Spiritual
Progress

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

I

LUKEWARMNESS TO FERVOUR

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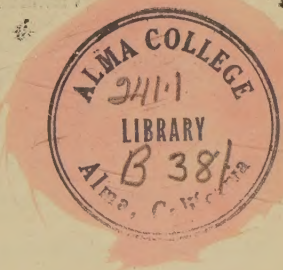
Spiritual Progress

Lukewarmness to Fervour

(*Complete in itself apart from* II. FERVOUR TO PERFECTION)

by L. BEAUDENON (†1916)

From the French



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THIRD IMPRESSION

Nihil Obstat.
OSMUNDUS COONEY, O.F.M
CENSOR DEPUTATUS.

Imprimatur.
EDM. CAN. SURMONT,
VICARIUS GENERALIS.

WESTMONASTERII,
Die 5 *Junii*, 1912.

Made and Printed in Great Britain

NOTE

This book, and its companion volume, "Fervour to Perfection," both show the practical helpfulness towards Spiritual Progress of the Progressive Use of Confession and Direction.

In the first place (p. 1) you will find an *immediate preparation* for confession, including a very practical method, considerations which are calculated to produce good dispositions, and very definite questions for self-examination.

Frequent references indicate the pages where a fuller treatment of the subjects may be found. You can read them at leisure and as you may need. There is no better way of spending the time that sometimes has to be passed in waiting at the confessional.

Then come two chapters which are the common basis of the two volumes. The first chapter sets forth the *progressive method*, showing its spirit, its divisions, and its course (p. 73); and the second chapter, the

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principles of confession : rules for self-accusation, contrition, purpose of amendment, and satisfaction. This chapter is not only one to read at the outset, but it should be read over again from time to time. Many have far too narrow and vague notions on these matters.

Then comes a study of *lukewarmness*. It begins with some *general ideas*.*

Lukewarmness is subdivided into *extreme* and *lesser lukewarmness*. Each will be the subject of a special essay, consisting of two chapters : I. Its *Character* and *Causes ;* II. Its Remedies, or its *Spiritual Treatment*.

We invite special attention to the latter. The treatment of *extreme lukewarmness* gives a fair summary of the duties of the *ordinary Christian* life : prayers and religious exercises,—struggles against the most dangerous sins,—ways of obtaining mercy.

The treatment of *lesser lukewarmness*

* As will be explained further on, lukewarmness is not merely spiritual languor and laziness, but an *evil disposition of the will*, inclined to think lightly of venial sin. This much may be said here to reassure certain timorous souls.

makes a real initiation into the life of *piety*. Those who are more advanced in virtue will be able to find some useful hints and, above all, a practical summary of what they have read elsewhere.

Signs of progress are assigned to each of these states, and they will enable account to be taken of what has been achieved and of what is still wanting.

The book concludes with a supplementary chapter specially devoted to *Relapse*, which is such a pitiable evil (p. 255).

Do not overlook the little table on p. 292. Simple as it is, it affords an infallible means of advancement towards perfection. Be brave enough to fill it in, and you will thus obtain the principal matter of your examination of conscience and of your self-accusation.

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THE IMMEDIATE PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

PRELIMINARY DISPOSITIONS

Shun all sorts of distraction in going to confession.—If you have to speak, do so with reserve.—Avoid looking about.

On entering the church, walk slowly, take the holy water *carefully*, and choose a quiet place.—It is a good thing to go as near as possible to the tabernacle.

After that: 1. Put yourself in the presence of God; 2. ask for His help.

Put Yourself in the Presence of God

How is Thy presence to be called to mind, O God? A lukewarm soul finds a veil between Thee and her. She may say to herself that Thou art present; but she does not feel aware of Thy presence. In her daily life the thought of Thee is, indeed, so unfamiliar.

How am I to find Thee? I do not seek Thee. Thou art, indeed, no enemy of mine, but, alas! Thou art a stranger! Reason tells me that we live in Thee as a bird lives in the light or a fish in the sea. Faith assures

me that Thou givest me life every moment, and that in Thee I move and have my being ; that I am more closely united to Thee than to myself ; that nothing escapes Thy attention ; and that nothing is a matter of indifference to Thy love. Alas ! these truths bring me no light ; I cannot realize them ; they are ideas the meaning of which I fail to grasp.

Even now, when I beseech Thee to have pity upon me, to fix my thoughts, and to make me feel Thy presence, I am still dead to all sense of uplifting !

O that my wretchedness and its acknowledgement might touch Thee ! O that my needs might stir Thy merciful heart, which has never been appealed to in vain !

Thine immensity surrounds me. Thy majesty overshadows me. Thine angels, who behold Thy face, wonder at my deadness. At any rate, fill me with the conviction that Thou art really there, hearkening to me, *looking upon me,* and inclining Thine ear to hear me.

"*Fill me with Thy holy fear.*" Remove far from me the bewildering whirl of vain thoughts. Take possession of all my faculties, my memory and attention, and concentrate them upon the important act which ought to change me and restore me to Thy love.

O Jesus! Thou art really present in the tabernacle on the altar before me. There Thou livest. There Thou remainest day and night for me. And as for me, I can hardly realize that Thou art really there and awaiting me! I come in, kneel down, and go out, and yet too often I have never spoken to Thee! I treat Thee as a statue or a picture, which merely recalls someone who is absent. Thy real presence is woefully unreal to me.

O Jesus, Thou lovest me enough to overlook my forgetfulness and disrespect and indifference; love me enough to make me feel Thee in my heart! Here I am on my knees. Thou seest that I adore Thee, and acknowledge my nothingness and wretchedness; I bow my head and confess the wrong that I have done. I implore Thee to make me fully conscious of Thy presence, and to fill me with the sense of reality!

Ask for Help

What do I wish to do? I want to make my confession seriously, to see my way clearly within, thoroughly to know my sins and the state of my soul. I mean to repent and to make reparation; I mean to shake off the lukewarmness that paralyses me.

Too often, alas! I only seek out my faults

in a superficial manner ; it is not enough for real self-knowledge !—I devote too little time and too little care to the awakening of regret ; —not enough to change my life ! No : this is not the way to get rid of lukewarmness !

Dear Lord, when I am lukewarm, I cannot make a good self-examination or a good repentance ; I am even incapable of making an act of good-will ! Thy grace can do what I cannot. It can do all things. Thou hast promised everything to him who prays, and now my prayer is full of supplication, demanding and hoping everything from Thee !

How am I to discern my faults ? I keep so little watch over myself ! How am I to feel their inconsistency ? My heart is so dull ! As soon as it is not a matter of grave sin, nothing seems wrong to me. The habit of committing venial sins has taken away from me the feeling of being troubled by them, and even deadened my conscience to their guilt.

I do not ask Thee, O my God, and Thee alone, to give me a perception of my faults and to make me regret them ; I ask Thee to help me to overcome them. I wish to seek for them myself amidst the darkness of the days gone by, and I wish to stir up my heart to protest, and my will to react against them. Enlighten me arouse me, sustain me !

O Jesus, grant that I may console Thee to-day! Above all, let me consider Thy sorrow, for I would fain become better in order to please Thee! Poor and unstable I am indeed. Discouraged I will not be. I wish to be truly filial and full of trustfulness. Thou wilt open Thy heart with all its benevolence to me. The father of the prodigal son was less indulgent and tender-hearted than Thou, for he was only a type of Thee. I am confident of Thine assistance, as soon as my good-will enables Thee to act within me!

Invoke the Holy Ghost

O Holy Ghost, infinite light, show me my soul as it is! O Holy Ghost, let Thy creative warmth rekindle in me good feelings that abide, and, so far as is needed, grant me to receive from above such as I lack! This I beseech Thee by Mary and Jesus, and by Thyself, in the name of Thy mission, which is to transform us; and in the name of Thy great work, of which I am, though unworthy, a predestined instrument.

Make Thy light shine so that I may understand; stir me with Thy holy motions so that I may feel! In the order of faith, I can only bring my desire and my prayer; and, even here, I need grace in order to desire and to pray. . . . Oh, show me Jesus with His pierced hands and open heart, and make me feel how far these wounds are my work!

Invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary

O Mary, if thou hadst done what is impossible, if thou hadst offered the least resistance to thy Son, what wouldst thou have felt, what wouldst thou have done? What tears would have seemed to thee enough to wash away such an offence? What heart-rending expressions would thy grief not have invented? And what an excess of new affections wouldst thou not have made to spring from thy heart?

O Mary, who art in heaven and lookest down upon the earth, behold thy poor child; have pity upon him, and spare no effort to save him. Does a mother make calculations? Thou canst do everything; I only beg thee to touch two hearts—Jesus' heart and mine. Ought not thy two children to be reconciled and reunited by thee?

Note.—Do you feel that you have no courage or hope, and that you are full of infirmities? Do not think about it, for this is no time for such thoughts. Rather act as if you were not yourself, but some good and faithful child of God. Let there be all around you an atmosphere of immeasurable kindness and infinite mercy. Inhale confidence and let your heart expand.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

For those who go to confession often, the examination of conscience should be *brief and without anxiety*;—brief, otherwise it infringes on the time which should be assigned to the more important work of self-reformation;—and without anxiety, for to accuse one's self of venial faults is optional.*

1. Begin by recalling the kind of sins you *specially proposed* to yourself to avoid, when you made your last confession. This counsel is of capital importance; it is the guiding thread of our method, which is entirely based upon the particular examen.

2. Next, look for those sins you have committed, which are relatively grave.

3. Having done this, run through one of the following special lists of questions.

Do not try to remember all the accusations that may apply to you in every kind of way. Limit yourself to those that are *peculiar* to you, and more particularly to those that are *certain* and *important*.

Distrust routine. As habitual faults occur to the mind of their own accord, before accusing yourself of them, make sure whether you have really committed them.

* Remember that absolution effaces all faults, whether *explicitly* confessed or not, as soon as your general contrition includes them in principle.

GENERAL LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR THE LUKEWARM

Part I

SINS THAT HINDER THE NOURISHMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

(*Common to all the lukewarm.*)

1. Morning and evening prayers omitted, curtailed, or said too rapidly (habitually? frequently? sometimes?).—No attempt at recollection before beginning. (The sign that I have said them badly: I feel that I have not really been speaking to God.)

2. Sunday Mass heard without any spirit of faith—unprofitably—without using any book, or reading the book carelessly. Improprieties: looks of curiosity, useless talking. (The sign of not hearing Mass well: I did not realize that my Lord was present. I brought away no religious impression, no desire to be better.)—That day I did no other religious exercise.—I undertook certain works that are forbidden. (Name them.)

3. I ate meat on Friday, and for such a reason.—I allowed myself to be influenced by human respect.—I made jokes upon religion, about priests. . . .

4. I omitted such and such a pious exercise: reading, the rosary, a visit to the

Blessed Sacrament (through forgetfulness ? from weariness ?).—I performed them carelessly—my examination of conscience at night was only vague or superficial. (The sign of the importance of an omission : dissatisfaction with one's self, general languor.)

5. So far as God is concerned, my day was almost a blank ; I thought of Him rarely—I did hardly anything to please Him—I forgot to ask for His help in occasions for sin.—The thought of heaven and hell is far from me. (This inner silence shows that the life of the soul is at a very low ebb.)

6. Instead of praying and pulling myself together after committing a sin, I gave up altogether—I have been discouraged for even less than this ; for instance, owing to a mere difficulty, or because something was not to my liking.

7. I forgot to make any serious resolution at my last confession—I went to Communion without love and without profit, because I made no effort. (Especially if there was no preparation on the previous days, and no thanksgiving on the subsequent days.)

NOTE.—Observe once for all that, in our examination of conscience, several of the accusations noted are not sins. But if, strictly speaking, they do not belong to confession, they still come within the sphere of direction : now, we are here aiming above all at the reformation of our lives.

Part II

Sins that Compromise the Life of the Soul

Note.—These sins are quite unlike those that affect the nourishment of the spiritual life ; the former differ according to a person's age and position ; we therefore give two lists below.

I

Special List for Pupils in Schools.

1. Habitual idleness that takes the mind away from God and makes one indifferent to serious matters, such as work, duty, respect, etc.—Disturbing the class or one's schoolfellows. (Setting a bad example.)—Wasting time, slackness, laziness.—(Consequences : discontent, irritation on account of merited rebukes and punishments.)

2. A spirit of independence towards persons in authority.—Feelings of aversion.—Rough replies and murmurings.—Disobedience.—A bad spirit. (The remedy is to see God in all these persons.)

Want of gratitude and affection (it is difficult to accuse one's self of this, and it is rarely done).

3. Dangerous or excessive affections.—I am too prone to think of them.—I am stirred with anxiety, jealousy, anger. . . .—Bad

thoughts or desires (entertained willingly, or feebly rejected, without any thought of God or any attempt to divert one's thoughts).—Enervating day-dreams.—Doubtful conversation.—Unsuitable reading.—Culpable looks and liberties, etc. (Am I determined to give up all the foregoing ?)

4. Quarrels between equals.—Insulting or abusive language. — Treacherous conduct with regard to anyone I do not like (telling damaging tales about him, or getting him into trouble).

Do I try to give pleasure ? Do I take pains for others ? Do I give to the poor ?

5. Vanity and affectation.—Despising inferiors.—Jealousy of those who are in higher esteem than myself.—Excessive feelings of mortification from wounded pride.—Oversensitiveness, etc.

6. Lying. (Name the motive. I lied to brag, to excuse myself, to do someone an injury.)

II

Special List for those of Riper Age.

1. Holy purity. Each must look for his own special temptations.—At all ages bad thoughts are dangerous.—Sins made almost inevitable through occasion or habit. (Not to take means to avoid them is to consent

to fall anew.)—It is a mistake to think that in riper years bad books may be read, or that conversation may be free from all reserve.—With regard to one's pleasures: the conscience must be well probed: are they disturbing? do they arouse dangerous feelings? Then they must be regulated, and perhaps avoided.—Sometimes the desire to please may be of an unhealthy nature.

Am I greedy? effeminate? sensual? (These dispositions lead on to graver sins.)

2. Antipathies, aversion, hatred: there is someone I detest—all he does is displeasing to me—I speak against him—I make his life disagreeable to him—I cannot think of him without being in an ill-humour. The person is one whom I ought to love and respect.

3. I am easily upset by difficulties, and when they occur, I rebel against God.—I pray, and when my prayer is unanswered, I give way to doubt.—Sometimes what I read, or what I hear in conversation, fills me with some such feeling of discouragement; and I do not react against it.

4. My life is ruled by self-love (say what kind: pride of place, knowledge, riches, beauty, etc.), and hence I often run down others, and at times have recourse to untruth.

5. My life is so disturbed and engrossed that I have no time for self-examination and

prayer. I have made no effort to alter things.

6. I am over-anxious about things material; and, compared with them, I attach no importance to holy things.—I am vexed with my position, and even blame God for it.

7. I often venture to judge other people's behaviour, and even their intentions. I am glad to talk about their faults and to ridicule them.

8. I have told lies. (Name the motive. It is more important than the lie itself.)

9. Hours altogether wasted.—Careless idleness. — Duties neglected. — Inadequate or blundering supervision.—Weakness in giving orders.

NOTE.—Grave sins occur to the mind of their own accord, and all of them must be confessed. If venial sins are numerous, you may—as is also profitable—accuse yourself of the most vexatious, the most habitual, and the most inveterate, alone.—Avoid mere repetitions that are lacking in real conviction, and which are nothing but padding.

Mention the *number*, or, at any rate, the frequency, of your failings. (This is obligatory for mortal sins—useful for certain venial sins—burdensome and meticulous for lighter failings.)

Above all, say clearly whether the fault is a *voluntary* one, and how far it was so. Nothing is more essential, and yet, strangely enough, nothing is more generally neglected!

METHOD FOR THE REFORMATION OF ONE'S LIFE

Seek out the Cause of Your Sins.

If you would make great progress, follow up your failings till you have found the cause from which they spring. To facilitate your efforts, later on we shall enquire into the *causes* of the state of lukewarmness (pp. 112 and 183). Refer now to one or the other of these two passages ; and read them with the closest attention.—Here it is that an effort must be made. A vague perusal would lead to nothing. Here, above all, the divine illumination must be earnestly asked for: "O God the Father, show me the hindrance that stands in my way, the evil that is preying upon me.—O Jesus, help me to see.—O Mary, leave not thy unhappy child in darkness."

The result of such considerations ought not to be a general *impression* of a bad state of conscience, but a *definite* perception of some defective side of the character. If you are able to say, " Yes, that is it ; but for this hindrance, all would be well," then you may be sure that you have put your finger on the spot.—Next, go on to contrition.

CONTRITION

Having got thus far, some people in thei inexperience stop, because they have gone farther than is their wont, and now see what is wrong with them more clearly ; they then think that they have attained their object, as if knowing an evil dispensed one from seeking its remedy. What would be said of a doctor who made a thorough diagnosis of the disease without prescribing any treatment? When the special object of the struggle is known, the fight begins. Leave all else, and gather all your forces for this main assault.

First, busy yourself with contrition, which will enable you to *break* with the evil.

To break it off, it must be so well known as to make us *condemn* it sincerely, and, if possible, regard it with horror.

Do not be satisfied with superficial considerations.—Peruse a few of the following pages : they have the advantage of being connected with your state and of harmonizing with the various parts of this book.—Read only a little : stop at anything that strikes you, and let it sink into your mind.—But, above all, pray ; pray as you read. We must make efforts ; but it is grace that makes them bear fruit.

Preliminary Considerations of General Utility

Before God.

Every sin, even a venial sin, is an act of injustice and folly. God, acting fully within His rights, issues to us certain commandments. All these commands, even the least important, are inspired with His goodness and ordered by His wisdom for our real good. Now, to His goodness and wisdom we make answers such as these : " I will not ! It costs too much "; or, " It does not please me ! I will not do it !"

Man is foolish enough to treat with the infinite majesty of God, as if he thought himself on an equal footing with the divine Being. He does this unconsciously, and that is his excuse ; but, nevertheless, it is a miserable thing to do.

In order to show us exactly where we are, St. Ignatius puts before us a wonderful method, which begins with these words : *Minuendo meipsum*—" I will grow less and less," by setting myself time after time over against greater and greater immensities.

I

What am I compared with all mankind? I pass in review all the continents and islands of the world. I see crowds of men of different races scattered everywhere, sometimes in masses, and sometimes dispersed. I fasten my eyes upon a great town and its countless crowds. Looking down upon them from a height, the roofs seem to extend far away to unknown horizons. The main streets seem to be narrow channels letting in streaks of light. The people on foot and the carriages are like the running hither and thither of an ant-hill. And then, suddenly I tear my eyes away from this spectacle to fix them upon myself. Ah, how small do I appear, and how little do I count!

Oh, what a crowd I see before me! And yet, far away, what hosts of men are scattered over the face of the earth!—Only think! This multitude merely replaces one like it that has passed away, to-day reduced to nothing but dust! And that crowd, again, only followed one that went before it! The centuries that have gone have witnessed generations succeed generations unnumbered; and the centuries to come will perhaps see still more follow!

Imagination sinks beneath this ever-rising flood, which spreads behind me,

around me, in front of me, and, indeed, everywhere ; millions and millions of human beings, among whom the wise, the powerful, and the great of the world, are as if they were not !

What, then, am I ? What am I ?

II

But if I am lost, and as it were drowned, in this ocean of mere humanity, how will it be if I try in astonishment to survey the angelic hosts ? Here I have not only to encounter the force of numbers ; I am staggered by their superiority of nature. And here, again, how many are the millions upon millions of Angels and Archangels, of Principalities and Powers, of Virtues and Dominions and Thrones, of Cherubim and Seraphim, distributed through the created heavens which God has made His abode, and which, far from limiting His being, show its boundless nature ; for the marvels that they display are but a ray of His glory.

Now, in this ray—this simple ray which is so much broader than all our conceptions—dwell beings more beautiful than the most beautiful of our dreams. We imagine them with golden wings, with azure veils, impetuous in flight and dazzling in brightness !

Yet all these things are but shadows. Their beauty comes from divine irradiation, of which we can form no conception ; and this divine radiance is reflected in all directions from one choir of angels to another, so as to multiply the glory and bliss infinitely !—And, before my dazzled eyes, these entrancing bands open up into endless vistas, and seem to troop from all quarters of the heavens, rank upon rank, in unending succession !

What, then, am I ? What am I ?

III

All these, however, are but created beings ; but the whole of creation, coming from the hand of God, does not detract by a single atom from His infinity ; or, rather, all of it emanates, not from His being, but from His *mere will*, like the harmonious notes that rise from a great organ in their manifoldness and sonority without taking away anything from it. His infinity unfolds of itself under the twofold aspects of time and space, if one may so speak of what is absolutely eternal and immense. All created things, the beauty of nature, and men and angels, are outside of it, mere thin and unsubstantial shadows.

What ! Are all mankind in all ages, and all the angels, just nothing, a mere shadow ?

Yes, a shadow, for what comes from nothing can be no more.

And God, the Most High, the one necessary Being, the Infinite, the Perfect, who contains all, who overflows everything—is He to allow Himself to be treated with impunity as an equal by such an imperceptible atom as myself? And am I to venture to cast up an account with Him and to be rash enough to oppose Him?

Ah, then, what am I? What am I?

O Almighty Lord, let me bend down in the dust before Thee; never can I abase myself enough in Thy sight! I feel my pretensions crumble into nothingness, and I see that all disobedience is but madness.

O Almighty Lord, Thy greatness and immensity and all Thine infinite attributes rise before me, the least of beings, like a mountain to crush me, or like an ocean to overwhelm me. I utter a cry, which is an ardent prayer, and immediately all this immensity is full of maternal tenderness. The being who stoops and prays calls forth in Thee the Being who forgives!

First Series of Special Considerations for Extreme Lukewarmness

Towards the Abyss.

I

Yea, thou goest towards the abyss—thou, who livest without restraint and without prayer; thou, who keepest up secret ties with evil, especially if, after sinning and confessing thy sin, thou dost not trace it to its cause. This abyss is mortal sin—mortal sin rooted and ruling like a master in one who has lost all feeling of regret, all hope of recovery, and all elasticity of will.

O unhappy soul, dost thou perchance console thyself with thinking that thou hast not fallen so low that these dark forebodings can apply to thee? True it is that thou art not fallen so far, but to what is this due? Look well: it is not due to the strength of thy resistance, but to the absence of temptations and of dangerous occasions, and perhaps to the divine mercy; or may it not be because thou wast the object of certain special prayers? Thou art shaken to the very foundations. Thou art like some ancient ruin that still remains standing—until the next storm sweeps down upon it.

II

Thou cherishest illusions as to thy state : it seems to thee far from dangerous, because it is not altogether a state of mortal sin ; and thou forgettest to what it is leading thee.

Thou art falling asleep amidst numerous and grave venial sins ; and thou wouldst not thus fall asleep in definitely acknowledged mortal sin. Through constant evasion, the conscience loses its straightforwardness ; by constantly giving in, the will loses its energy. By constantly displeasing God, the lukewarm soul wearies Him. Wilt thou not soon succeed in arousing His wrath ?

Thus, O poor soul, thy strength ebbs away, and, at the same time and in the same degree, God withdraws. Oh, if thou couldst only understand the meaning of this increasing desertion that will soon leave thee alone—alone with thine own nothingness ! But no : the perception of all this does not now strike thee. God is too distant, and He has shown Himself so patient that thou calmly persuadest thyself that He will never forsake thee !

Dost thou not perceive that thou opposest a twofold resistance to God's grace : the want of good dispositions, and the want of corresponding therewith ? Verily, God will not

employ a refractory instrument; nor will He lavish the marks of His kindness on one who repels them.

III

Formerly, much used to be said about the abuse of grace and the punishment it brings. Sometimes, perhaps, the picture was rather overdrawn, but to-day the tendency is all the other way.

This is a result of mistaken social ideas being applied to the sphere of religion. We believe ourselves on an equal footing with everyone, even with God, and that with a *naïveté* as perilous as it is ridiculous. It reveals not only blindness of will, but also lawlessness. God is supposed to have only one attribute, that of loving-kindness, and the ideal of this kindness is assumed to be an excess of weakness. Thus is the wonderful balance of the divine attributes forgotten, and yet it is the combination of kindness and justice that attracts and restrains, imposes moral laws and secures their execution.

Take care, then, now to recall some of those stern truths of which it may be said that "*Heaven and earth shall pass, but My words shall not pass.*"

1. God has no need of me.
2. If He were to treat him who takes ad-

vantage of His grace, and him who abuses it, in the same way, He would encourage evil.

3. Grace is an absolute necessity for us.

4. God is obliged to abandon some souls.

5. There is a hell. Many, who are better than I, have at last fallen into it.

The Gospel affords us several parables which confirm these truths, and give them a more vivid expression. Especially meditate on the following :

1. The barren fig-tree cast into the fire.

2. The servant deprived of the talent that he had not turned to good account.

3. The foolish virgins rejected for mere negligence.

4. The vapid salt cast aside and trampled under foot.

5. The branch cut from the vine, condemned as useless, and burnt.

In the Abyss.

Thou wouldst fain stop on the threshold of mortal sin. Take care ! It is very indefinite, and the approaches to the abyss are very slippery. To skirt these slopes requires a very sure foot, and thine is but halting ; guides, too, are needed, and God does not give them on these forbidden paths. Nor does thy reckoning take account of sudden attacks of giddiness. One day the threshold

will be crossed, and a fatal day will it be for thee.

Once in the abyss, O lukewarm soul, thou wilt not easily escape from it, and for this reason: thou hast long familiarized thyself with evil in thought, by dallying with it and almost touching it. And now thou feelest it no longer, or, at least, it gives thee no pain. Long indulgence in venial sin has been to thee a deadening narcotic, or, rather, like a dissolvent that destroys an organism. The slowness of its encroachments has been its strength. Thy conscience has grown acclimatized in these deadly surroundings. Thy soul is lifeless, slack, decaying already, when mortal sin attacks it.

Such an incursion is always to be dreaded; but the worst of it is, that it may *creep on with subtlety* in darkness and silence: in the dimness of illusion, in the silence of a slumbering conscience, too deaf to hear.

Ignominy.

St. Ignatius compares the bad state of the soul to an ulcer.

Ulcers show inner corruption. Slack lukewarmness reveals a corrupted soul. Both ulcers and lukewarmness are repulsive; we shrink from the sight of them and shun what comes from them. Either of them may result in death, and they are only to be

cured by attacking them in their deepest origin.

From lukewarmness, like the evil discharges from an ulcer, spring unwholesome desires, feelings that would make one blush if they were known, and, lastly, the sins that bring humiliation.—A neglected ulcer soon produces gangrene. Lukewarmness, when cravenly left alone, issues in mortal sin. Mortal sin, in a soul hitherto sound, would have been no more than an unhappy accident, quickly recovered; but, on the contrary, in a vitiated soul it is the final development of an evil that can hardly be remedied.

True it is that such disfigurements are invisible, but they nevertheless exist. The soul is covered with them, and they defile her; they are like the secret sores hidden by the wretched under the folds of their garments. Do they lose aught of their virulence and uncleanness, because no one suspects their existence?

Note.—This is especially the state of those debased souls who only escape from mortal sin to fall into it again, because their life remains basely lukewarm. They seek for forgiveness, because it is easy; but they attain no final cure, because it demands an effort.

Lukewarmness dragged into the Daylight.

Even in this most wretched condition a person is rarely *fully conscious* of the evil that he does, and especially of the gravity of the risks which he incurs. And this is what explains certain strange delays and Satan's tactics of preventing any serious reflection. Such a soul thinks only of going in the direction that is pleasant, and of avoiding any duty that is disagreeable. He feels, indeed, that he is wrong, and that he is doing ill; but his notions of wrong and ill *remain confused.*

Here is a piece of advice for such an extreme case: *Come forth into the daylight—i.e.,* come into the presence of God vividly realized.—If possible, draw very near to the tabernacle; and there, on your knees, recall the sins that are to you an insuperable hindrance, and say plainly to God: "*I will not* give up such and such a thing,—I will neither undertake this means nor any other,—I will not put myself to serious inconvenience,—I know that I am grieving Thee, and that I am ungrateful,—I know that I am running the risk of falling still lower,—I know that in the end I may make Thee abandon me,—I know that Jesus is now here before me, and that He is ready to raise me up, and that I distress Him by

my resistance . . . but *I will not* do what I know is my duty ; I will go on, even this very day, allowing myself to do this and not to do that. . . ."

Will you go on to the end of the sad list ? I think not. At the outset you will feel that it is too much, and yet that it is only too true.

And now, perhaps, for the first time you begin to be aware of your sad state ; the sense of uneasiness seizes you in its grip ; and you may change it into a sense of fear in meditating on the following consideration :

God's Silence.

" I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me ?" (Ecclus. v. 4). Alas ! you do not understand God's silence.—But this silence broods over all creation : the stars rise and set ; living creatures live, struggle, and disappear ; man blasphemes or adores—and God holds His peace.

And, nevertheless, not an atom of dust moves without His marking it ; not a sound is heard but that He perceives it. There is not a single human motion that He does not see ; man thinks, and every thought is unfolded before His eyes like the pages of an open book.—Nay, more. This very atom is raised by God, and it is God who imparts its vibrations to it. My hand acts, and it is

He who sets it in motion. My arms would hang down lifeless, if He did not sustain them. In the same way, He inspires the heaving of my chest and the beating of my heart, and my senses and my faculties, and even what I freely determine.

And He works thus in everything, and everywhere, and always. Were His action to cease, all would cease; if He were to withdraw, only nothingness would be left.

What a mystery! Nothing betrays His presence or manifests His action: yet He is there and acting, and He keeps an unbroken silence.—In my wretchedness I groan and sob; He listens and loves me, and holds His peace.—I sin and persist in sinning; I provoke Him: He is wounded, and He holds His peace.—I cry out to Him: "Tell me, at any rate, whether I am in a state of grace."—The great, impenetrable silence falls from on high upon my question, my complaint, and my sins, as if it were the silence of nothingness.

His hour has not yet come. His hour is marked at some definite point on the dial of inscrutable eternity; and He will not anticipate it.

Let us tremble before this terrible silence: such is its great lesson. The silence says to us: "Make no mistake; nothing passes unnoticed or will be forgotten. I see the evil and hold it in horror, and I keep silence; I

see this lukewarmness, and it moves Me to repulsion, and I keep silence.—Awake and shake off thy torpor ; if I break My silence, let it not be to curse thee."

Neither Happy nor Good.

I

But the saddest thing about your sins is that they do not make you happy. Lasting happiness is only to be had in those conditions that have been established as normal by God. He who sets them aside is like a traveller who leaves the beaten track to go at haphazard through quagmires.

Are you wanting in kindness and charity ? Then you are not liked, and you are grieved at it. The case will be still worse, if you cherish aversions or jealousies : then you have a serpent gnawing at your heart.—Do you pass the time in day-dreams ? You will meet with rude shocks from realities.—If you give yourself up entirely to some one affection, you will not receive an equal affection in return, or else you will be left in the lurch.—What is perhaps worse, you may yourself become weary of it, and afterwards feel that you are incapable of loving.

Our failings drag in their train a thousand troubles and anxieties, and these griefs meet with no consolation : God is no longer there to wipe away our tears.

II

Nor is it we alone who are affected by our sins. Those around us suffer from our ill-humour, our pride, our over-sensitiveness, our want of consideration, and our unjust neglect. And we suffer because we make others suffer: for we happen to become aware of it, and are provoked and cry out against other people's unreasonableness, unless we are ourselves later on aroused at the thought of our injustice. Those whom we love would be happier, had we not overstepped the wise limits laid down by divine laws.

The Road Back.

The Discouraged Soul.—I have no power even to will! And what is the use of trying? I shall never persevere! I have no feeling or desire or love!

Jesus.—Poor child! Thou hast no power even to will! How true, and how sad! Thou art like a sick man who can neither eat nor move.—And when thou triest to rise, like some wounded bird, thou fallest again heavily to the earth. Thou hast neither feeling nor desire nor love; I know it better than thou dost. To feel, to desire, and to love, is to live; and, as for thee, thou art scarcely alive.

Child of God, listen! Thou hast just acknowledged that thou hast no strength in thee; well, now is the time to look for it in Me. Desire, and will, and steadfastness—all these thou lackest; but all these may be restored to thee, if I give thee My grace.

The land is waterless; the flowers are withered;—then a gentle rain falls from My heavens, and all revives. And this is an image of My grace.

There is none fallen so low that My grace cannot raise him; no will is too weak for My grace to sustain: "*In a moment it can transform utter wretchedness into worth.*'

Mine is *redeeming* grace.—It is altogether adapted to fallen humanity, and does not shrink from any moral deformity.—And since it is all-powerful, it is able, in case of need, to create what is wanting.—Poor child, have confidence!

The Soul.—I do not deny that Thy grace is powerful and able to raise me up; but what difference will it make, if Thou do not give it me? And not to grant it would be only just: Thou leavest the lukewarm soul, and, according to Thy word, Thou holdest it in horror.

Jesus.—Thy state is what I hold in horror; thy state of *ill-will* which refuses to make the necessary renunciations; thy cowardly state which even makes thee shirk praying.—No, this is not thyself.—For thee, I would

return to the paths of earth to bear thee back to the fold in joy.—For thee, I would once more ascend the hill of Calvary without hesitation. And is that not loving?

No, thou knowest not the meaning of My mercy; it is more than the greatest loving-kindness, it is more than even a mother's love. And yet, beneath rags and most degrading filth, a mother will recognize her child, and, while he has a single breath of life in him, she hopes and waits.—And as for thee, thou art no dead child, ready for burial; thou art only a poor sick child, who may be healed and yet do great things.—And in order to raise thee up again, I require of thee so little! Couldst thou not stretch out thy hands towards Me?

If only thou wouldst pray! Pray: that is the rule. Pray, and I shall then have the right to send thee My grace.—Pray, and keep away from everything that is ruining thee; put thyself under good influences. My grace needs thy co-operation. Provide the remedy, this I can do; but it is for thee to take it.—Forgive thy sins, this is what I have to do.—Help thee, this is My duty.—Love thee, this is My happiness. Oh, enable Me to do all these gracious things. Pray and hope.

An Exhortation to Renunciation and Generosity.

Jesus.—I will speak to My poor child. He raises his eyes towards Me, but still hesitates: yet I love him and want him to be entirely Mine.

The Soul.—O good Jesus, destroy my torpor; tear me away from half-resolutions and half-measures; speak to me some words of final decision.

Jesus.—This is what hinders thee: thou wilt not renounce this affection that disturbs thee, that gratification which enervates thee.—Thou wilt not bind thyself to this exercise that would strengthen thee.—Thou givest up praying, because it wearies thee, and, must I also add: often, very often indeed, thou fearest not to give Me pain: and that, in order to please thyself? Now, is this right?

I was in heaven. The angels were in adoration at My feet. I was surrounded on all sides with happiness. Nothing was wanting to Me. And, nevertheless, I came down to this cold and cruel world. And I willed to undergo privation and suffering, and to take pains. For whom did I do all this? For thee, as thou well knowest; but, I am sure, thou hast never really understood all it meant, for that would have been too ungrateful!

Thou art struck by the immense multitude of men for whom I died, and thou sayest to thyself: I am but a little unit amongst all these, and so I only owe a little fragment of gratitude, not even an infinitesimal part. It is the work of the Church as a whole to honour so general a service, like the country that honours the heroes who have died for her.

The hero who dies for his country does not know each one of those for whom he dies, whereas I, for My part, distinguish thee from all others; and for *thee alone*, note it well, I was ready to die: would the greatest of heroes have done as much?

Learn to understand the soul of One who is God, a soul so great as to embrace all creation.—Every day, and even every second, I have seen, I see now, and I shall see, all mankind and each individual man.—I had thee by Me at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, and on Calvary; I have borne thee unceasingly in My labours and in My bitter trials. I wanted, I want now, and I shall always want, to be able to love thee as one loves an only-beloved. Alas! I saw thy sins, and they ever filled Me with grief, all the time.

Even in heaven I still see thy sins, all thy sins, and if they do not still cause Me suffering, I detest them none the less.—But thy repentance, thy good resolutions, thy sacrifices, and thy love, are not only before My eyes; I feel them and enjoy them, for they

are heavenly things; they mean happiness, and a welcome increase in My happiness.

Let us tear away every veil; thou wilt say no more: "What do my sins matter to Him?"—Thy sins! There is not one of them that does not affect Me. All of them came together to smite Me during the years I spent in suffering on earth.—It is only in heaven that thou wilt understand the depths of martyrdom I had to endure during those three-and-thirty years. All the offences of thy life, yesterday's as well as to-morrow's, are far from being confined to to-day: *they all lie within the reach of the divine foreknowledge;* I had to *look upon* them as well as to bear them.*

Think well on it: whatever thou doest now will give Me pain or consolation. If thou sinnest to-day or to-morrow, it is but another sorrow that thou inflictest upon Me. If thou refrainest from sinning, it is a sorrow spared to Me. Against this order of things thou canst do nothing. It may appear to thee inscrutable, because man's comprehension *cannot* grasp everything; but believe it as if thou couldst see it with thine eyes, for it is *the truth*, and what this truth suggests, that do.

* This universal and individual regard, embracing even the future, seems extraordinary. We do not reflect that Jesus bore all our sins, and that, as Redeemer, He was *fully conscious*. He saw and felt every sin that He expiated; and every one of our regrets was a consolation to Him.

Second Series of Special Considerations for Those who are Advancing

What God willed.

Jesus.—O soul who art still imperfect, but ever dear to God and redeemed with My blood, wouldst thou become better?

The Soul.—That is my desire.

Jesus.—Then, stay and consider. In heaven, and in the mind of God, there is an ideal for thee. It is thy life's story written beforehand in accordance with the graces that had been laid up for thee. What beauty, and loftiness, and nobility of soul! What love for God! What abundant consolations! What inward peace!

But to realize this ideal, efforts were required. By progressive degrees, thy nature would have been freed from its defects, thy will would have become resolute and energetic, thy conscience straightforward and tender, and thy heart would have been seized with the love of things eternal.

And at times hast thou not had a glimpse of these things? And on seeing them, hast thou not aspired to a more perfect life? What has become of the graces of light, and of the still deeper graces of divine appeals?

The Soul.—Yes, indeed: all this is true; but to-day I find such language hard to understand.

Jesus.—Wouldst thou have a deeper insight? Then look at what is going on within thee. What is the direction of thy thoughts and desires? Hast thou tried to make thyself some ideal apart from the divine one? Dost thou really aspire towards what is great, and beautiful, and generous? Dost thou think much of making others happy?

The Soul.—Oh, how this light hurts me! I am living a haphazard life, without an aim. My virtues are merely due to circumstances; and, when I look within, I am ashamed of my selfishness.

Thou alone, O my God, canst tear me from myself.

Thou, O Jesus, with Thine eyes upon Thy heavenly Father, hast conceived the ideal that Thou settest before me; it is the loving possession of the Infinite! He who is without this ideal lacks the real meaning of life.

Jesus.—My child, I do not altogether take away this meaning of life from souls who are unfaithful. It clings to their Baptism and to all the graces that they have received. If it leads them on when they are in the right way, it brings them back to it when they have strayed from it. It is a Christian

aspiration, which is never altogether stifled. O My child, open thy soul to it to-day more freely than yesterday, and lukewarmness will begin to be distasteful to thee.

The Soul.—I feel that I am powerless to recover.

Jesus.—God is ever the *Creator*, and He will Himself *make* thee a new heart.

Once more listen : My Father is so powerful that He can make, despite the evil thou regrettest, a fresh plan, other than the first, but as beautiful, and perhaps more beautiful ; for love derives a wonderful ardour from the sense of ingratitude. Look at Mary Magdalene, St. Augustine, and many others besides. Look and hope.

The Soul.—Ah, yes. I open my heart to hope. What Thy Father desires of me is so sweet and beautiful ! And Thou, O Jesus, art not Thou pity incarnate that uplifts, and divine love that transforms ?

What God sees.

Each soul has a physiognomy, and features of beauty or ugliness, like a face. God sees us as we really are. St. Ignatius teaches that sin would still be ugly, even if it were not forbidden. Sin is contrary to the *order of things* established by God, and to His ideal ; it is therefore a *deformity*.

But what is lukewarmness? It is letting things go, the *laisser aller* of a nature corrupt from the beginning.

He who will say at the outset, and that in good faith, "I have nothing to hide," on looking deeper into himself, will feel ashamed. What a deal of low self-interest there is that he would not acknowledge to anyone! What an amount of foolish self-love! What desires! What mad dreams! What a number of unknown circumstances, which, if they were brought into the light of day, would involve disgrace! For instance, a highly respectable person caught obviously lying.

The nearer anyone gets to the ideal, the more does he reproach himself for falling short of it. Those who have abandoned the ideal no longer perceive their shortcomings; but God sees them, and withdraws from them.

What God feels.

Remember what He says of the lukewarm. What He says, He feels; and what He threatens, He does. "*Because thou art lukewarm, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth.*" What! can this word come from the God of love and forgiveness? How is it that from the same heart proceed affirmations of the tenderest love, and contemptuous threats of aversion? It is be-

cause the more loving a heart is, the more does it revolt against ingratitude.

You welcome a friend with the most affectionate greeting, but if, at the same time, you feel that he is full of disdain, do you not then shrink away from him with a kind of horror? No, God would not be so pained by the gravest shortcomings of those who do not know Him as He is by the least of ours. Do we not rely upon our friends? And is it not they, alas! who only too often make us suffer most?

In these days of general falling away, Jesus seems to look upon us with the tearful eyes that He once cast upon His Galilæan hearers. He had just been giving a prophetic revelation of the Eucharist. He was not understood. Many of His disciples were scandalized, and turned their backs upon Him and left Him. Do you note what the Saviour said to those who remained behind: *"And will you also go away?"*—And those who now stay behind are we!

On hearing this exclamation, the faithful disciples pressed around their ever-beloved Master, saying: *"To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."*

Meditate on this scene. Take your part frankly. There is no middle course; nowadays we must be with Jesus or forsake Him openly. That is the only consistent thing to do—but to stay with Him through cir-

cumstances, or from habit, or from mere fear of hell, is only folly or calculation, and Jesus will not have it.

Unforeseen Responsibility.

The thought of responsibilities incurred is a consideration which is scarcely ever borne in mind.

Here we have to do with those responsibilities in which others are concerned, and more particularly with such as spring from our culpable shortcomings.

You are living with those who are dear to you, and who do not live a Christian life; perhaps you are grieved at it; ask yourself if it ought not to be to you a matter of remorse.

But, what am I to do?

Well, if only, when you were younger, you had prepared yourself for the part that you might have to play; if, when it was still unforeseen, you had corresponded with the grace which was foreordaining it, and had acquired the ardent faith and deep, strong love which alone are catching; if, in your faithfulness to God, you had won such a position as makes prayer sure to avail; if the solidity of your character and a greater impressiveness in your qualities had gained you more influence over those you were to be called upon to save, you would not

now feel such distress and so heavy a responsibility.

Be well assured, for this is what explains the barrenness of so much that is attempted in Christian circles, that *intensity, and intensity alone, produces fruitful results:* this alone is fruitful, because God blesses it, because men see in it a manifestation of the divine, and because intensity alone brings all our powers into play. And would you not determine to shake off at all costs the lukewarmness that makes you incapable of doing the good which you alone, perhaps, are able to accomplish?—Would you not learn to detest the defects which hinder your influence and give rise to murmurs that cast discredit upon religion? Would you not once more resume the prayers and pious exercises and communions which would fill your soul with God and enable you to appeal strongly to His heart?

If you are young, prepare. If you are of riper age, reform and make reparation.

Ne derelinquas me, neque despicias—"*Forsake me not, neither despise me*" (Ps. xxxvii. 22).

Forsaken, like a poor child on the broad high-road! alone! gone astray, destitute, with no one to care for him! O God, O Father, wilt Thou leave me thus, because I

am guilty? I acknowledge that I deserve it; I should, indeed, have worn out any patience other than Thine.

Thou hast tried so often to uplift me completely; so often hast Thou shown me the way of peace and light that leads to the heights. So often hast Thou borne me in Thine arms, and given me an assurance of pardon, and support, and love.

Thou didst build upon me such beautiful hopes; Thou wouldst give me generosity of soul. Thou gavest me everything—those around me, my teachers, inward graces—and still Thou findest me lukewarm, without any ideals or any taste for heavenly things, filling Thee with disappointment!

If Thou leavest me, what will become of me? Thou wilt see me go from bad to worse, and grow still more unworthy of Thee. If Thou leavest me, to whom shall I go? To anyone, alas! who can give me pleasure; and thus I shall be altogether lost to Thee, and shall be no more Thy child, and they will say: "His Father has cast him off."

Despised: I shall be despised by Thee, despised like refuse that is flung away, like a worthless creature of whom nothing can be expected.

And yet it is only too true that I have neither beauty nor goodness nor moral strength, and that I have allowed everything to become feeble and petty and tarnished, in spite of having been sanctified by baptism, and by my first communion, and by numbers of priceless graces.

Even my human faculties have had their part in this decadence: I am not really kindly, indulgent, patient, and disinterested. I grieve even those whom I love, and to-morrow I begin anew what I regret to-day.

O my God, in spite of all this, "*do not disdain or despise me, and do not cast me off*"! Thou alone hast no right to do such a thing, for Thou art my Father. Does not even an earthly father always keep some hope of his son? and if it be only an illusion, the illusion is a noble one, because its sole ground is a father's love; and a holy one, because it keeps open the door of repentance, and it comes from the fatherhood which Thou hast formed in Thine own image. And wilt Thou not retain in Thine infinitude of mercy that which Thou hast given as a perfection to Thy limited creatures? Then let us not continue to repeat in our churches the words of hope and love that have lost their truth: "*There is no father like God*"!

Ut quid Domine, recessisti longe?—*" Why, O Lord, hast Thou retired afar off?"* (Ps. x. 1).

Oh, the hazy distance in which everything is hidden—the keen sense of deep solitude—the way one shudders at the thought of one's own littleness and feebleness and loneliness! —*" Why, O Lord, hast Thou retired afar off?"*

Once I used to walk close to Thee in confidence; I used to go peacefully along the way which Thou hadst marked out for me. In weariness or danger, I clung to Thy hand in prayer. Along the road there were plenty of flowers, and on my brow fell a flood of light. *" Why, O Lord, hast Thou retired afar off?"* so far away, that I cannot discern anything of Thee! so far, that I cannot make Thee hear me!

" I cry unto Thee, and Thou art ever silent!" Is it that my groaning is too weak? Is it that Thy heart is dumb? What! Never a word, never a sign of love, of faith, of repentance, to make itself felt in the bitterness of my soul! Nothing but emptiness, an emptiness like unto death!

I call upon Thee in prayer! I am like a poor child weeping on the threshold of his father's house which is closed against him! If he breaks off his long lamentations, it is

only to listen. Perhaps someone will answer? Perhaps he will hear the sound of approaching footsteps?

Oh, why art Thou so silent? Speak, speak, if only it is to reproach me for my sins and inconsiderateness, for the promises I have so often broken, the sacrifices I have so often refused to make, and the unworthy affections that have so often distressed Thy heart; but for mercy's sake, O Father, keep not silence; it is too like death!

Respice in me! Even if Thou wert near me, still, if Thou look not upon me, we shall yet be far apart. Oh, the look that turns away, what separation it implies! A look is a sign of the soul that yearns. Look upon me, that I may know how Thy soul feels towards me.

"*Look upon me!*" not with the universal regard that falls upon everyone, but with the look of loving-kindness of a Father's countenance, full of affection, even though tinged with sorrow.

Oh, the looks that meet at last, the eyes that mutually fill with tears—tears of repentance and tears of forgiveness, tears of love on both sides. What sweet things are dimly discerned through the tears of a divine distress!

O my God, when wilt Thou look upon me again? When shall I once more hear Thy voice? When shall I regain Thy longed-for presence? I repent, I am grieved, and I implore Thee!

A Call to Confidence.

Jesus.—My beloved child, lay thy head upon My breast; come and be revived by the beating of My heart; I desire thee never to be lukewarm again, never again!

I see what discourages thee: thou wouldst fain be better, but all of a sudden, and without any new falling away. Thou art in too great a hurry, and it were too good to hope for! Everything comes by degrees: day draws on little by little, the green things rise out of the ground slowly and gradually, and the soul becomes better by effort upon effort. —Thou knowest that I am very kind. Make one step to-day, and if thou fallest, I will raise thee up. Leave to-morrow to My providence. Man's wretchedness is the triumph of My all-powerful loving-kindness; it changes into holiness and remains humble.

This wonderful love fills thee with astonishment. Is it really so genuine and so persistent?—Listen, thou art about to learn to understand something of this mystery; heaven will reveal it still more fully, but in all its depths it will remain for ever hidden

in the infinite. I love thee, too, because thou art of My family, "*of My flesh and of My bones*": and My blood flows in thy regenerated nature.—My love for thee is not only benevolence and kindness and friendship, it is also a *paternal* love: thou art the further continuation of himself which a father looks for in his child!*

Wilt thou alone not feel these sacred ties, when nothing makes Me forget them? And if I call upon thee, if I adjure thee now to remember them, it is for one thing only, that I may win thy confidence. But it must be a confidence that is resolute, brave and indestructible. Poor discouraged one, arise! Poor slave, break off thy chains! Child of God, let Me lead thee by the hand to a happier destiny!

Protestations and Prayers.

In listening to Thee, O Jesus, I felt, as it were, a breath from on high pass through my soul. This freshness of hope, this divine call, this echo of a love which I have ignored, this victorious breath, brings me life. A new spirit thrills within me, and the world and

* God is truly man's Father only by the communication of His grace. In creating man, He does not impart to him anything of His own nature. Thus, the Christian alone has the right of sending up the cry which touches His heart: "O my Father!"—*in quo clamamus: Abba, Pater!*

duty and my eternal destiny stand out before me clear and serene.

At last I feel that I can will, and that is just what Thou wast waiting for! To be willing is to stretch out to Thee an honest hand; to be willing is to take my place in Thy train; to be willing is to get rid of hindrances, and to take proper measures; and this I will do.—Away with half-decision; away with half-measures; away with secret leanings that silently bring one back to bondage; and lastly, away with lukewarmness: I mean to pray, to act, and to love.

Alas! if I had only made up my mind before! How many years have gone by, and how much strength have I lost! How much distress have I inflicted on Thy heart! And I spoke to Thee with my lips, and used to receive Thee in Holy Communion without knowing Thee, apart from whom one can neither will nor live!

And I did not know Thee, because I neither uplifted nor steeped my mind in prayer. Thy features are only to be discerned in the light of heaven.

Oh, the confidence of prayer addressed to the loving-kindness of One who is omnipotent; the humility of prayer that comes from one like myself; oh, let me persevere in prayer despite the despair of feeling cold! Thus shall I find salvation!

O Jesus, the grace that I beg of Thee above all others, the grace of graces, is the grace to pray without ceasing. I know that prayer is not essentially gladness or sweetness; it is far more than that, it is our necessary help, *the means par excellence;* the means of coming back, the means of perseverance, the means of perfect holiness;—the normal means in the supernatural order in which nothing is due to us;—the means, designed by our heavenly Father, to establish an interchange between our universal neediness and His inexhaustible riches. Grant that in perpetual prayer, the handmaid of pity and of supreme grandeur, I may have unshaken hope.

O Mary, perfect Mother, who ever bringest Jesus to us, by thee it is that I find Him once more!—Oh, how tired thy arms must be of holding Him out to me in vain, and how I love thee for never despairing of my heart!—Present me in turn, and give me to Jesus. He is far too much thy Son to despise this poor, useless, trembling being who is so in need of Him!—O perfect Mother, see that thy two children never henceforward leave one another!

FIRM PURPOSE

Contrition has revived your good desires, and you feel that you are quite changed. But note well that you are only changed so far as your *feelings* and good-will are concerned; you will only be radically changed when your life has become better; and this improvement will only follow, if you make enlightened, prudent, and definite *resolutions*. This must be the result of your preparation, otherwise you will merely arouse desires which end in nothing.

In the examination you have made for your sins and in your search for the causes from which they spring, you have already discovered the failing which is the greatest hindrance to your progress. It is now time to decide upon the *means* of overcoming it.

You will find these in plenty under the heading *Treatment* (pp. 115, 199). Make use of them when you have enough time at your disposal.—Shorter hints will be found at the end of this volume, under the heading *Improvement* (p. 246). They have the advantage of indicating rather the virtue to aim at than the failing to resist, and this plan is broader and more full of encouragement.

As you read and look for your subject, and as you arrange it as well as you can, stop

from time to time to address an earnest invocation to the Holy Ghost, the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to any Saint in whom you have especial confidence: "O Holy Ghost, enlighten me.—O loving Mother, help me; I implore thee by the heart of thy divine Son!"—Everything we do for the sake of our salvation must be steeped in prayer.

Succeed in coming to such a definite determination that you can say with satisfaction: "Yes, that is it!" so that you may be able to suggest it yourself to your confessor, for it is no business of his to spare you this trouble.

The table which is on the last page of this volume will be of the greatest use to you in obtaining a clear decision. Keep it under your eyes; mentally reply to the four questions that you will find there set down; and, if you have the courage, set down in writing, at the earliest possible moment, the answer which you have already given in your mind.

Here follow a few subjects for resolutions, arranged according to what has just been said; they may always serve by way of example, and some may be adapted to your needs. You will find others of considerable utility in the little book entitled *Pratique de l'Examen particulier, d'après Saint Ignace* (see particularly pp. 35 *ff.*).

SUBJECTS FOR THE PARTICULAR EXAMEN

1. I will observe myself as to *my prayers.*
2. I will take the means of making none without putting myself *seriously in the presence of God.* (Every evening note the result.)

1. I will observe myself as to my *aspirations* towards God.
2. I will take the means of making one aspiration every time I change my occupation. —Or else I will make two in the morning, and two in the evening. (Note the result.)

1. I will keep watch over myself as to such and such an *excessive affection.*
2 I will take the means of making an *act of love* for God each time that *the affection seizes me.* (*Note the result.*)

1. I will keep watch over myself as to such and such an *aversion.*
2. I will take the means of forcing myself to *think of the good qualities* of the person concerned, and of finding an opportunity of *speaking well of him* and of *avoiding* any unfavourable thought about him, even if it were well-founded. (How many times have I done so ?)

1. I will keep watch over myself as to *frivolous conversation.*

2. I will take the means of *renewing* this resolution as soon as I get up, and then again twice in the morning and in the evening.—Or else I will set myself a *penance* when I have really given way to frivolous talk—or else I will fix upon certain *periods for absolute silence* from time to time.

I propose to have special recourse to the *divine mercy.*

Means: 1. I will select a few short *invocations* to the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin Mary; I will use them from time to time; every evening I will note how often.

2. I will find an opportunity of *pleasing God* at least twice a day; but it must be done very definitely, and drawing His attention thereto in a filial spirit.

3. I will reawaken the *feeling of my wretchedness* at certain moments; for instance, before every prayer—or by *kneeling down on purpose,* and *kissing the ground,* at such times.

1. I will keep watch over myself as to *reveries* and *bad thoughts.*

2. I will take the means of turning my mind away as soon as they occur.—(If one's spirit of faith is sufficiently robust): I will

look up to God who reads the heart, and I will think of heaven and hell.—If possible, kiss the crucifix, or place your hand on your heart by way of protest.

1. I intend to cultivate a sense of *personal dignity*.

2. I will take the means of never acting, even on the least occasion, from a motive that I dare not acknowledge—or, better still, I will give my principal actions an elevated motive.—(Note the number of acts thus made during the day.)—Another means: I will maintain an easy dignity in my way of laughing or speaking, etc. ("Let us show distinction in our bearing," said Father Ravignan to his brother, while they were still in the world.)

I mean to cultivate *kindliness*.

Means: 1. I will take great pains not to *hurt* anyone's feelings.—I will penalize myself even for accidental slips (aggravation, contradiction, disdainful or harsh treatment, showing signs of being bored, etc.).

2. I will be more *open-hearted* with my friends, and, above all, I will enter more fully into their tastes instead of thinking of my own. In the evening, I will ask myself if I have pleased them.

3. I will be *amiable* to everyone without

affectation ; and not for the sake of being well thought of, but in order to be really kind : I will endeavour to make others speak rather than to talk myself, etc.—(Ask myself at night : " Whom have I pleased during the day ?")

4. If I detect any selfish impulse—*e.g.*, taking the best seat, choosing the best of anything, thinking too much about myself, etc.—I will check it earnestly.

1. I will keep watch over my *evenness of temper*.—(Sudden changes of disposition arising from annoyances, outbursts of exuberant merriment, anger at contradiction, sudden depression, peevishness, surliness, etc.)

2. Means : Self-restraint, calmness, extending to one's *inner self*.—On the other hand, get away from self to avoid depression.

I will keep watch over myself as to any lack of *spirituality :* 1. In practice (following my own tastes, not putting myself out, etc.) ; 2. in feelings (taking account merely of decorum and reasonableness, etc., and giving no consideration to God and His interests and wishes).

I will take the means of obliging myself morning and evening to practise one or two mortifications (be satisfied with very easy

ones, and specify them, if possible)—or else: I will take care to offer God such and such actions before doing them.—I will take a short time daily to put myself directly under the divine influence.

I will keep watch over myself with regard to *impulsiveness.*

1. I will take the means of stopping several times a day to reflect on what I have to do (fix the moment beforehand),—bind myself to a few minutes' absolute silence,—stay apart for a time,—sometimes kneel down in my room.

2. Further means: Stop before doing something agreeable which is quite allowable—*e.g.*, before drawing up to the fire, reading a letter, beginning some pleasurable occupation, etc.

1. I will keep watch over myself with regard to *worrying.*

2. I will take the means of making an act of confidence in God *when any occasion arises.*

1. I will keep watch over myself as to *oversensitiveness.*

2. I will take the means of quickly and whole-heartedly resisting any disturbing, bewildering, or unhappy impression.

I will keep watch over myself with regard to *despondency*.

1. I will take the means of avoiding whatever entertains such a disposition (thinking too much about my troubles,—talking about them needlessly).

2. Another means (the most effective): I will maintain an open and cheerful expression.

I will be on my guard against the *bitterness* that poisons existence or grieves those about me.

1. I will take the means of making frequent interior acts to *sweeten* the spirit: acts of hope, love, and confidence.

2. Another means: I will shake off any thoughts that *renew* such impressions.

3. Or else: I will endeavour to give pleasure to those about me.

I will keep watch over myself as to *discouragement*.

1. I will resolve to pray better when making such and such a prayer; to do such and such a duty more thoroughly. (Note the result in the evening.)

2. Other means: Have recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Sacred Heart. (Fix the number of times, and note the result at night.)

3. If I have been slack and feel discouraged, I will at once resolve to do something to please God.

I will keep watch over myself as to the *presence of God.*

1. I will take the means of practising *deeper recollection* once in the morning, and once in the evening (oftener if I can).

2. Or else : I will keep silence a few minutes (so many times), during which, while still going on with my work, I will place myself in the presence of God. Or else : I will recollect myself at every change of any important occupation.

1. I will keep watch over myself as to *converse* with God.

2. I will take the means of expressing such and such a feeling to God at least twice, morning and evening. (Fix upon what it is to be, choose such as go deepest, or, if required, adopt some well-known invocation.)

Express it : do not be satisfied with vaguely *feeling* it. This is most important.

AT THE CONFESSIONAL

The *Confiteor* may be said before going in, if many are present. In this case, after saying, "*Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,*" begin thus: "*At my last confession, on such a date, I promised to watch over myself on* SUCH AND SUCH A POINT, *and to use* SUCH AND SUCH MEANS. . . . *I have fallen off in this, and there has been some improvement in that. It is due to* SUCH AND SUCH A CAUSE." Give details.

Next, accuse yourself of your sins, specifying a few, without too many explanations; then add: "*I also accuse myself of all the sins that I have forgotten, and of all those of my past life, especially of those against . . .*"

Then submit to the confessor the particular *resolution* you have taken, and the *means* chosen to carry it out.—Receive his advice with trustful obedience.

N.B.—Let there be no interruptions—do not try to recall what you *know* you have forgotten—the important thing is to listen to God, whose instrument the priest is—the supernatural gift of light consists in being in harmony, not with the exhortations given, but with the temper that welcomes them.

At the moment of absolution, hear Jesus Christ Himself saying to you: "*Thy sins are forgiven thee. Go in peace, and love more.*"

AFTER CONFESSION

1. Avoid all anxiety, give free play to the feelings of *joy* and *gratitude*.

2. Renew your resolutions.—A very filial way of making them more definite, and more keenly realized, is to repeat them to Our Lord *explicitly*, drawing nearer to the tabernacle for the purpose.—Before leaving, bow your head and ask Him to bless you.

3. It is a good thing to say one's penance as soon as possible.—Sacramental penance is always binding, as a debt; and therefore, any that have been put off must be done, even if they were given several confessions previously.

Effort nearly always ceases after confession, and what a pity it is!

Do you not see that just now your purified soul is full of fresh vigour with the divine life that has been imparted to it? Now is the time to speak and to sing. You have a right to affirm your love; you have a right to utter your gratitude; and if your poor bruised heart is unable to give expression to its feelings, let your faith suggest the words to be used. They will be real, even if you cannot feel them. Will you be satisfied to be ungrateful?

How can you so soon tear yourself away from the arms so wide open to forgive you? How can you be unwilling to prolong the comfort of feeling your life revive?

Have you not also to take forethought? Alas, what has the past to say to you? Let not the resolutions that you sketch out for yourself remain vague, and few and far between. It is mere levity to be satisfied with forgiveness; but a serious mind looks for *perseverance,* and a spirit of faith is bound to cry out for the *help* that it feels that it needs.

Here are a few forms that correspond with these various requirements.

I.—*Non moriar, sed vivam*—"*I shall not die, but live*" (Ps. cxvii.).

NOTE.—The following are especially suited to those who are emerging from a grave condition.

A sick man coming back to life.

A feeling of consolation: how he has suffered!—A feeling of deliverance: what dangers escaped!—A feeling of hope: how wide and peaceful is the horizon that opens before him!

Life is finding its way through every fibre of his organism, making him feel its warmth and comfort and activity: "*No, I shall not die, but live!*"

A reckless traveller emerging from an abyss.

A dark abyss : a sense of light regained ; a fresh outlook upon everything ; everything looking more beautiful than ever !

A miry and foul abyss : a clinging impression of disgust, disgust with the filth one has felt and touched, disgust with one's self. Does not some trace or redolence of it remain ?

A deep abyss wherein lies death : a feeling of astonishment ; can it be really me ? Have I not been dreaming ?—A sense of rapture : I am once more back in the air and the sun, and on the earth with its countless joys ! *" No, I shall not die, but live !"*

A man condemned to death who is unexpectedly pardoned.

Time after time, in spite of himself, the scene of the place of his execution, the eager and hostile crowd, the gallows, and the sudden leap into the darkness,—all this has been vividly brought to his imagination : a feeling of agonizing fear lies heavy on his breast, disturbs his brain, and covers all his limbs with a cold sweat !

He is pardoned and free. *" No, I shall not die, but live !"*

A feeling of immense relief : he sees all the lugubrious imaginings of the day before disappear, he breathes again, he recovers his self-possession, he is born anew.

A feeling of superabundant gratitude : he is ready to show thankfulness to the whole world, even to those who have done nothing for him, and to things unconscious, for his joy overflows!

A feeling of a life with a fresh start : it must be a worthy life, a life to wipe out the past. Nothing will be hard after all the anguish he has gone through.

All these different feelings, like echoing chords, break forth in a hymn of gratitude based on the constantly repeated words : "*I shall not die, but live : and shall declare the works of the Lord. The Lord chastising hath chastised me : but He hath not delivered me over to death. Open ye to me the gates of justice : I will go into them, and give praise to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, the just shall enter into it*" (Ps. cxvii.).

"*No, I shall not die, but live ; I will give glory to Thee, because Thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. O praise ye the Lord, for He is good ; for His mercy endureth for ever*" (Ps. cxvii.).

"*With expectation I have waited for the Lord ; and He was attentive to me. And He heard my prayers, and brought me out of the pit of misery and the mire of dregs. And He hath set my feet upon a rock, and directed*

my steps. And He put a new canticle into my mouth, a song to our God" (Ps. xxxix.).

I will sing it in my prayers now made better, and in my aspirations now become more frequent; I will sing it with a more realized faith and with a more demonstrative love; I will sing it by living a new life, a life of generous endeavour, a life of penance and example. *"Many shall see and shall fear: and they shall hope in the Lord. Blessed is the man whose trust is in the name of the Lord. Thou hast multiplied Thy wonderful works, O Lord my God: and in Thy thoughts there is no one like to Thee"* (Ps. xxxix.).

No, no: I will not die, but live; no more will I draw near to death; no more will I go down into the night of evil that leads to the abyss; I will live and glorify God!

II.—*Custodi me, Domine, ut pupillam oculi—"Keep me, as the apple of Thy eye"* (Ps. xvi.).

NOTE.—The above and the following expressions are better suited to more sensitive consciences.

The Soul.—How can I ask Thee for things so lovely, I who am without merits or even goodness, and almost without love? Thou hast no need of me, and I know not how I

may become dear to Thee as is to a man the apple of his eye.

Jesus.—Soul, who hast returned to Me, pardon has given thee everything : merit and goodness and love. By My blood, which has been shed upon thy head, My merits have become thine ; by My grace, that has permeated thy repentance, thy goodness begins to revive ; and will not the love I have shown towards thee provoke thee to love Me in return ? Thou art, then, all Mine, entirely made what thou art by Me. My life has taken possession of thy renewed being. Thou art precious to Me as something that has cost Me dear, and I surround thee with care, as one wraps about anything that is very fragile ; and therefore thou mayest use the words that surprise thee : "*Keep me, as the apple of Thy eye.*" It is I who put this word into the prophets' hymns long ago, and it is I who put it in thy mouth to-day !

The Soul.—Sweet, indeed, must be the Heart which inspires such sweet expressions ! I begin to be grieved at having made Thee suffer so much ! I knew Thee not, and methinks I should have known Thee even less, had not my indifference and my sins made me appreciate the extent of Thy mercy. How good must Thou be to love such an one as myself ! Thy divine loving-kindness fills me with wonder and gratitude, with happiness and confusion.

Since, then, I am so dear to Thee, and my sins would be a bitter unkindness to Thee, since, in Thy tenderness, Thou art willing to ask for my filial affection, I will adopt and repeat these exquisite words unceasingly: O my God, O my Father, O my Jesus, "*keep me, as the apple of Thy eye.*" I am as sensitive as an eye; like it, I am exposed to countless external accidents, and Thou sayest that I am to Thee as precious. Oh, for my sake, and for Thy sake still more, take good care of me!

III.—*Sub umbra alarum tuarum*—"*Under the shadow of Thy wings*" (Ps. xvi.).

This shelter is sweet and safe, O Heart of my Jesus; I venture to ask for it! Once, with Thine eyes full of tears, Thou didst offer it us, as Thou breathedst out this lamentation: "*How often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldest not!*" Jesus, to-day I would, I entreat Thee.

I am cold, and Thy wings are so warm! I am afraid, and Thy wings are a true refuge! Who could tear me from them? They are as strong to protect as they are soft to nurse! —Ever close to the heart, and familiar with all its beatings, the wings are full of motherly feeling. The little chicken, who hides and is lost beneath them, seems to be only one

with its mother and to live in her life. O Jesus, how I would fain lose myself in Thee, live in Thy life, and no longer run any risk of the dangers from which I have just escaped!—There, indeed, I am, enfolded in Thy tenderness! In this shelter, I would gather strength and grow! Hither, too, would I flee from time to time during the day, and very quickly at the sight of the least danger! There is not a day nor an hour when Thy wings are not open to receive me.

Thy wings! Thy wings are to me more than a shelter, they are my hope. Art Thou not the royal eagle that flies to the summits, and thence looks at the sun? Oh, when wilt Thou raise me in Thy upward flight to a diviner region, where I shall drench my eyes in the day-spring from on high?

Thy wings! Oh, take me on Thy wings to bear me away from all that drags me down, from the life of sensualism, idleness, and cowardice, from the life without anything uplifting, without anything noble, which, being of the earth, earthy, forgets heaven!

Thy wings! Oh, for Thy wings to fly towards perfection! Oh, for Thy wings, to fly away some day into the infinite!

IV.—*Qui se existimat stare videat ne cadat*—"*He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall*" (1 Cor. x.).

Note.—The aim of these remarks is perseverance.

Qui se existimat stare :—you are now afoot, upright, on the road, fully assured that you have recovered your vigour : you will overcome difficulties ; you will sweep away hindrances, and, in your confidence, you are ready to ask if there are really any difficulties or hindrances.

Videat.—Open your eyes. First look at unhappy man. Do you not see the victims stretched along the way, in the ditches, lying at the bottom of the cliffs—and these had set out, like you, swift of foot and light of heart.—Some are tired out with the opening stages, and are now seated. Heavy torpor paralyzes their intelligence. The cold night air has fallen upon them and frozen their good-will.—What ? Are they dead, just because they have come to a standstill ? Alas, it is so ! The world possesses one of those deadly climates where life dies as soon as the motion that keeps it alive ceases.—Others, drawn on by their curiosity about the unknown, leant over the abyss : they did not foresee the giddiness which over-

powers the senses ; and now they have fallen into the worst of follies, almost without wishing to, and with a secret shame at their own rashness.

Videat.—Now let us leave the examples of others, let us turn aside from future prospects, let us call up the past, your own past. A few years, perhaps a few months ago, you were on your feet and full of ardour as you are to-day. And yet, during these few years, months, it may be weeks, how many sins ! What a life ! And how many times has the alternation of falls and recoveries occurred ?

For mercy's sake, meditate on the divine admonition : "*He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall.*" For if it be easy to fall, it is easier still to fall a second time.

O my God, clothe me with the spirit of fear that warns against danger ; encourage me with the spirit of confidence which inspires men to pray.

In giving me all my rights and all Thy help, Thou dost not modify the conditions in which human freedom works out its own destiny. I may remain poor in the midst of riches, if I do not turn them to account ; I may fall and perish, in spite of Thy fatherly love, if I prevent it from saving me.

Oh, that I might will and pray, fear and love, be humble and trustful; oh, that I might ever rise above the things of earth, and never fall again!

O Mary, look out before me on the way, and, at the least danger, whisper to me like a mother: "Take care, my poor child!"

THE PROGRESSIVE USE OF CONFESSION

THE METHOD

i. Its spirit.—ii. Its leading idea.—iii. The basis of its divisions.—iv. Theoretical and practical divisions.—v. Order of the states in the spiritual life.—vi. Course of the method.

i.—This book goes back both to St. Ignatius and to St. Francis of Sales. It borrows its method from the former, its spirit from the latter.

By applying to confession the method of the Particular Examen, it imparts to it the clearness and vigour that characterize the powerful author of the *Exercises*. By being steeped in the luminous and sweet doctrines of St. Francis of Sales, it becomes more easily adapted to the poor souls of our own days who stand in need of encouragement.

ii.—The *main idea* of the method is to *specialize one's efforts*. This is why it draws up as many special treatments as there are essentially distinguishable *states of the spiritual life*. The spiritual life, indeed, passes through different periods, and in each of these periods one meets with different sins and different dispositions. Nor can the same subjects and the same means

be put forward with advantage. One preparation, intended for everybody, must necessarily be confused and possess few attractions.

iii.—To lay down the distinctions between the different states, one must start from a *basis*. Now, this basis cannot be taken from the very *essence* of the spiritual life, for this cannot be observed ; it is to be found in the degrees of its *activity*, as shown by definite signs.

Thus it is that we give the name of *fervent* to one who faithfully fulfils the duties of his position as well as his exercises of devotion ; and of *lukewarm* to one who neglects them or carries them out very imperfectly.

But a person is more or less active according as his *will* or his *nature* is more or less well-disposed.

The will is *well-disposed*, when it is upright and resolute ; it is *ill-disposed*, when it is rebellious and merely hesitating.

But the will, even if well-disposed, is powerless, if it clashes with a *nature that is swayed by its failings*; but, on the other hand, its action will be made easy, if it is helped on by a nature in which *virtuous inclinations** rule.

* Spiritual activity depends absolutely on actual grace ; but, in fact, this grace acts according to the dispositions it encounters, either in the will or in our moral nature.

iv.—Thus we get our *theoretical divisions :*

1. The will poorly disposed and the nature morally crooked : extreme lukewarmness (the first state).

2. The will better disposed, but weak ; the nature less rebellious, but still without real goodness : lesser lukewarmness (the second state).

3. The will fairly upright and resolute, goodness of some worth, but still incomplete or badly established ; imperfect fervour (the third state).

4. The will entirely surrendered to God, and goodness established firmly ; complete fervour or perfection (the fourth state).

Sins more or less numerous result from the more or less unfavourable dispositions of the will and moral nature ; and they diminish, therefore, in proportion to the soul's elevation from lukewarmness to fervour and from fervour to perfection.

Practical Divisions.—Lukewarmness and fervour, being states which are essentially distinct from each other, require rules which are essentially different ; this is not the case with their *degrees,* which, belonging to the same class, naturally come under the same laws : thus, strictly speaking, two divisions might be made to do ; and, indeed, we have put the grounds for contrition, for example, which they have in common, all together : however, we distinguish separately their

peculiar *characteristics*, and the *particular means* that are suited to them: it is impossible to ask for the same amount from extreme and from lesser lukewarmness, from fervour that struggles and from fervour that reigns in peace.

v.—Do these four states regularly succeed one another? No, if one looks at the *actual order:* many, indeed, start with fervour, whilst others fall from a generous to a mean sort of life.—Yes, if one considers the *logical order:* for between these four states there is a reasoned gradation, advancing by forward steps until perfection is reached. This will be clearly perceived, if their respective characteristics are compared with one another.

vi.—Every good confession has three ends in view: 1. to *know one's self;* 2. to *make one's self known;* 3. to *reform one's self.*

With this object the *progressive method* gives for each state of lukewarmness and of fervour—1. the *characteristics* which distinguish it, and the *causes* that produce it; 2. a *list of questions* showing the faults most ordinarily met with in it; 3. the spiritual *treatment* which will result in a cure.

NOTE.—We use *Confession* throughout, in the popular way, to designate, indifferently, either the entire sacrament of Penance, or the special *accusation* of one's self, to which the word is applied.

PRINCIPLES

Preliminary Observations

i. What we should set before us in confession.—ii. What to avoid.—iii. The object of our method.

I

Every divine institution has an *ideal* which heightens its usefulness and beauty.

When this ideal is badly understood, the institution gets perverted and gives rise to all sorts of abuses. If it be lowered, the institution tends to become barren or mean.

1. The sacrament of Penance is the institution of pardon. The sad past is wiped out; the deserved punishment will be spared; the soul may breathe again; it is alive.

But to see in it nothing more than *pardon*, is a conception which is more or less selfish and always insufficient: sins have disappeared, it is true, but the *bad dispositions*, from which they proceed, *remain*.

2. The notion of pardon is only raised by adding thereto that of *reconciliation:* the father and child meet together in the feeling of love restored. The forgiveness of lighter sins may itself bear this name: do not recon-

ciliations take place in families after wrongs of slight gravity, but which are nevertheless painful?

3. The *generosity* of God shines forth, if one recalls the effects of an absolution: sanctifying grace, the divine life born anew and reviving; lost merits restored; rights to actual graces recovered.

4. But all these: pardon, love, grace, merits, rights,—all do not say enough; they are gifts or means; we must attain to a fuller ideal that gives a better expression to the *solid* and *definite aim*, the *vital* core of this institution.

This ideal is the *restoration* of the spiritual life, that is to say, the reconstitution of its virtues, the renewal of its energies—in a word, a cure, a state of health.

The method we propose attempts to realize this main idea; it offers a true spiritual treatment. Its immediate object is the soul's *cure*, and this distinguishes it from direction, strictly so-called, the aim of which is *training* in goodness.

II

The *spirit* of an institution is the way in which it is proper to *understand* it and to *apply* it. Confession, when badly understood, loses all its efficacy.

What narrow and formal obligations people are apt to undertake! They are a pure waste of time and strength. The idea of the true aim disappears. There is a sort of mechanical preparation and self-accusation. The mind is engrossed with inquiries and anxieties that God does not require, and is unable to go any farther with calm steps towards progress, and out of this anguish of spirit one sees souls come forth crushed and forsaking piety, or else narrowed, and perhaps misshapen, no longer able to appreciate its sweetness.

It is not in this wrong use, however common it may be, that the true notion of confession must be sought, but in the mind of Our Lord and in the teaching of the Church.

III

To attain its object, confession offers us a treatment both human and divine, for it is made of the blood of Jesus and of our tears. It is for us to make use of this precious blood, and to unseal the source of these tears.

This method affords hints to the inexperienced and some aids to the weak.

I.—The Mind of Jesus and the Gospel

i. The feelings of Jesus.—ii. The feelings He gives the priest.—iii. The strange mistake of certain souls.—iv. The part of mercy in the confessional.

i.—All that Jesus said and did, all that we know of His heart, cries out to us in His own words : " *Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.*" Is this the voice of severe and punctilious justice ? Far from it ; it is the call of affection that wishes to sympathize and heal.

Do not tremble before the look that falls upon you ; it is not the searching scrutiny of a judge, who wants to penetrate your secret ; it is a look, softened with tears, which appeals for an indispensable avowal.

When the avowal has once left your lips, the evil begins to leave you. Jesus is only waiting for this to embrace you in His arms, for He is more tender than the father of the prodigal son.

See His inexhaustible indulgence with the Apostles, despite their shortcomings ; and His wide mercy for the open sinners He meets with. There are no brow-beatings, no useless questions, no recriminations, no empty formalism ; and this broadness in His method is seen everywhere and always. Look ! He gives it a final consecration on the Cross,

when He grants, without a single reproach, the fulness of pardon to the penitent thief.

On one occasion, the divine Master wished to characterize, in a scene which can never be forgotten, the spirit which animates Him when He pardons. It was when He addressed the greatest of all His sons, who was the first to commit the outrage of denying Him. Does He say to the trembling Apostle: "Thou art an ungrateful wretch?" No, indeed. Not a bitter word, not a single spoken reminder. All is involved in one remark: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?"—We know the answer: it was worthy of the question. We know, too, how far his love impelled him to repent.

And shall we find this Saviour, who was so good when He was formerly on earth, who is so good now in the Eucharist, where He gives Himself so freely, who is so ready to welcome us in heaven,—shall we find Him, when we come to confession, a strict, dour, particular judge?

ii.—No doubt the priest, who takes the place of Jesus, cannot proceed directly. He has not the same direct knowledge. Hence a confession must be made. But how he wishes to save the poor penitent from making the avowal which seems so hard! How he longs to come to the point, when, knowing the state of his penitent, he is able to give the remedy along with the forgiveness!

iii.—There are poor souls who seem to be distrustful of Jesus, and who come forward with uneasy looks, as if He were setting pitfalls along the paths of pardon. They are ever full of cares and scruples, ever prone to disquietude and despondency ; and they go to confession as if it were a torment, and come away from it without peace.

Others there are, less anxious, but with no more frankness, who look upon confession as a harsh and dry *official act*. Is it thus that a father deals with his children, even if they are to blame ? All eyes are filled with tears because all hearts are full of love.

iv.—The Lord's yoke is easy, and His burden is light. He who makes confession a hard and difficult thing to himself does not know the mind of Christ. The feeling that should rule in one who seeks the God of pardon is confidence. And this confidence should be as firm as the ground on which it is based, which is called by the beautiful name of—mercy.

Mercy, be assured, can never be far from you, however much it may be belied by its appearances ; it can never dry up, no matter how much you may have abused it, for it is nourished for all eternity by the blood of Jesus, which is ever efficacious, and by His prayers, which ever ascend between us and the punishment we deserve.

Moreover, it seems as if God intended to

strip Himself of the right of refusing forgiveness by *enclosing* it in a special sacrament put into the hands of the Church ; other sacraments may be used exceptionally as remedies, but this sacrament is *the remedy*.

Hence we may infer that God has provided it with *all the means of healing ;* and these means will be never lacking to it, because they constitute its very *essence ;* and therefore, after countless falls, poor soul, in spite of all thy infirmities, have confidence, for here thou wilt find once more an ever-ready remedy.

II.—The Mind of the Church and Theology

The *mind* of the Church can be no other than the mind of Jesus. This mind will be felt everywhere and always, as the vital principle underlying all acts ; but it will receive different applications according to times and circumstances. How happy, then, are we to find in the principles of theology that breadth, which it would be wrong to criticize or to restrict, and that same simplicity, which, in the relations between father and son, keeps all formalism at a distance!

I.—Confession of Sins

1. PRINCIPLES.

I

Confession is only obligatory in the case of mortal sins; and further, there must be no serious doubt as to their reality or their gravity.

II

The confession of venial sins, even of the most important, remains optional; but it is sufficient matter for the sacrament.

III

The confession of past sins, whether mortal or venial, is also sufficient matter for absolution, and it is also an excellent expedient, when actual sins appear doubtful or fill us with no great amount of regret.

IV

Temptations, impressions, imperfections and defects, so far as they are but defects, are no *matter* for the sacrament and are not affected by absolution; on the other hand, they are essential material for direction.

2. COUNSELS AS TO THE CONFESSION OF SINS.

I

It is allowable, and it is also surely preferable, to be guided as to the confession of venial sins *by utility*. This inference follows from the principles laid down.

If you find it *more advantageous* to confess only a few of them, and this is the ordinary rule, decide to confess only a few. Moreover, the rest may be forgiven at the same time, as will be seen later on.

In acting thus, one concentrates all one's attention and all one's efforts on the most important, and often the most decisive points, on those especially that compromise most one's spiritual life.

II

Always make an accusation of what is *humiliating*.

This was the constant advice of a Jesuit Father who was a great director of souls. This means: go down to the quick; look for the little piece of perversity that tries to disguise itself; emphasize any little circumstance of an unfortunate character, any intention of which you are ashamed. Be all the more on your guard against covering up what is humiliating under a crowd of accusations that act as anodynes, or adorning it

with clever excuses, or getting it overlooked by an earnest outpouring of humble regret that uplifts you ; and especially beware of obvious exaggeration to make yourself seem humble rather than wretched.

Humiliation is the thing to try for. To *appear* humble is to evoke the opposite feeling, that of self-admiration.

For instance, you must altogether avoid calling yourself guilty when you are not, and making yourself out to be worse than you are. Here there is a great danger of spiritual pride ; for one takes satisfaction in the contemplation of this self-imposed humiliation. It has also a serious drawback : it prevents you from getting to be known, and from obtaining sure direction.

II.—Contrition

1. Its outward expression.

Contrition is a sincere regret that detaches us from sin.

1. This regret may be sincere without being felt. This often happens in the case of venial sins ; but there is no need to be alarmed at it. Feeling depends on one's impressions, but regret depends only on the will.

Some sins inspire but little repulsion ; some natures are less easily moved ; and

lastly, the same person, at different times, is more or less touched by the same feeling: the depth of the impression is *accidental.*

Hence, we may *really* regret a sin without *feeling* that we regret it. This disposition is the result of sins that are of long continuance, and which, at bottom, are hardly more than a sign of human frailty.

2. However, one must take care not to infer that the element of feeling has no value. It gives a peculiar intensity to regret; it seizes the soul, not by one faculty only, but in its *whole being;* and the feeling that comes from it is both keener and deeper. Any great contrition bears this character, and it is always found, even for the least faults, in those who are true Saints.

Let us aim at the keen impression that inspires one with an instinctive horror of sin, stirs the heart to its depths, and makes tears to flow; but let us be satisfied with sincere and calm regret, if it change our wills and detach them from sins committed.

3. The same remarks apply to the *difference* in the sorrow we feel for our sins, and that which we experience through the troubles of life.—Here we have a difference of impression, and not of *appreciation:* we *judge* the moral evil to be eminently deplorable, and we are therefore disposed to avoid it; but we do not expect our nature to *experience* with reference to it the same violent and

instinctive repulsion called forth by *things* belonging to its *own order*, like family misfortunes, terrible illnesses, and so on.

2. ITS QUALITY.

1. Perfect contrition is inspired by a true feeling of love for God for His own sake, a feeling of filial disinterestedness.

2. Imperfect contrition has for its motive a feeling of faith, but one that touches our own interests: the fear of hell, the desire of heaven, and the like. Gratitude, too, though ascending nearer to love, is one of its springs.

3. Let us add to these two kinds of contrition, which are *alone supernatural and alone sufficient* for absolution, the regret, which is often very serious, that comes from human reasons. Why not seek help from reason itself, which is a gift of God's, to return to Him with resolution? Grace comes to the support of nature, but is far from crushing it; it carries nature along with it.

Observation.—These three kinds of contrition may be found together with advantage, and one does not exclude another; on the other hand, they complete one another harmoniously, and engage the various resources of the soul. Human grounds and imperfect contrition lay a foundation of the most gross and solid materials; perfect contrition adds the crown, and gives them the highest value.

3. ITS EFFICACY.

1. It is to be noted that the *elevation* of a feeling is no measure of its *power*.

Its power is proportionate to the *action it exercises* over our will; but this action depends on our nature and dispositions. Often our personal interest provokes the most vigorous resolutions, and such as are most lasting.

"I will meditate on hell," says St. Ignatius, "so that, if my feeling of divine love grow weak, the fear of punishment may hold me in check."

2. The aim of contrition is to *detach us from sin;* but a feeling may be less noble, yet, if it be more intense, it will attain its object more surely.

Perfect contrition, however weak it may be, suffices for forgiveness, but *intense* contrition alone secures us perseverance: thus intensity shows clearly a greater vitality.

4. ITS PRINCIPLES.

I

Mortal sins are wiped out by the sacrament of Penance when we bring to it a simple imperfect contrition. They are even wiped out apart from the sacrament by perfect contrition; nevertheless, in the latter case, by divine institution, they must be ultimately

submitted to the authority of the priest, and one has no right to communicate before receiving absolution.

II

Venial sins are wiped out by contrition, even if imperfect, and there is no obligation to confess them afterwards. Hence it is clearly useless to torment one's self with worrying about minutiæ. When we have come to the point of confessing them, they are already wiped out.

Nevertheless, absolution is highly advantageous: 1. It ensures fuller purification; 2. it secures a diminution of temporal punishment; 3. it assures us of special grace to combat the sins of which we have accused ourselves.

III

Here is a great consolation for the conscience: an imperfect motive for contrition, when it is general, wipes out all venial sins, *even those which are not thought of*. Nevertheless, those must be excepted which are formally withdrawn from one's regret, such as venial sins which one is unwilling to give up.

NOTE.—A general motive is one which does not aim at such and such a class of evil—*e.g.*, the unseemliness of evil-speaking and lying—but the evil in itself or in its consequences, such as the divine displeasure it causes, the punishment it deserves, and so forth.

III.—Firm Purpose

1. Its Nature.

Good or firm purpose means the resolution never again to commit the sins one is confessing.

It is a necessary consequence of contrition, or rather, it is included in the same feeling.

Contrition regards sins from the point of view of the past; the purpose of amendment, from the point of view of the future. Contrition separates one from these sins, firm purpose repels any return of them. Taken together, contrition and firm purpose combine to form a *rupture* with evil.

This rupture must make no exception for any mortal sin, otherwise all of them continue; for one cannot be both the friend and enemy of God. It is otherwise with venial sins, which do not cut one off from Him: firm purpose may be brought to bear only on some of them. Then these alone are forgiven.

2. Mistakes About It.

But is there no risk of forming illusions concerning venial sins, and may it not happen that one is still burdened with sins that are constantly being confessed, and this to the great hurt of the soul's progress?

On the contrary, may not excessive exigencies, so far as firm purpose is concerned, plunge anyone into perplexities full of anxiety, which deaden activity, and thus, too, hinder progress? Let us try to throw some light on these two opposite states.

1. *Will and Fancy.* — Superficial people think they have a firm purpose as soon as they experience a certain reaction against anything wrong. "Certainly, I disapprove of it," say they, "and I wish, indeed, to avoid it."—This may be merely a platonic feeling. Let us see. You wish it. That is good; but it is not quite clear: now, do you *really wish it?* Are you determined and decided?—You wish it! Is it only a desire? Then, it is not a *determination*, it is merely an *aspiration* towards the good, and one may call it a fancy, because this incomplete impulse is conditional and vague, and is merely the *shadow* of an act of will.

Fancy usually stops at generalities, and if, from circumstances, it looks specially at such and such a sin, it is filled with nothing but barren lamentations so far as that sin is concerned.

Nor does fancy *seek out the means* to avoid the sins which it appears to deplore, and this is perhaps the easiest sign to know it by.

The will goes directly towards the end, and honestly takes the means required.

2. *Anticipating and Willing.*—A mistake of a more interesting nature is that of those, who have thoroughly decided to avoid such and such a sin, but feel in their hearts that they will fall into it again. If they looked at their actual resolution, this doubt would hardly come into their minds ; but did they not form the same resolution at their previous confessions, and does not the return of fresh occasions each time lead on to falling into the same sins ? Are they not deluding themselves when they reckon on doing better in future, considering the long series of repeated falls that stretches its depressing perspective through the past ? Hence, to trust to such a purpose seems like self-deception.

Let us analyze this subtle problem.

To anticipate and to will are not acts of like nature : to foresee is an act of the intellect ; to will is an act of the will.

To anticipate is to cast one's eyes on the probable future ; to will is to determine here and now.

A perfectly sincere person may say at one and the same time : " I intend to avoid such and such a sin ; and yet, I fear it, I anticipate it, I shall commit it again."

" To-day I am under good influences, and I gladly submit to them ; but to-morrow I shall no longer breathe this life-giving air ; to-morrow the occasions, of which I do not feel the attraction to-day, will offer them-

selves anew, and after more or less resistance, I shall end by giving in."

Are you *now* ready to give in to-morrow? —"Far from it."—If it were within your power to bind this resolution to your will, would you do it? "Yes, indeed, with all my heart."—Will you use some means?—"Certainly, not all perhaps, not the hardest, but yet I will use those which are necessary."

Well, that is firm purpose, not the vigorous purpose that is capable of the greatest efforts, and which chooses the most effective means, cost what it may; but the firm purpose of a weak soul, sufficient for pardon, since it submits to the sacrament of Penance one who is really detached from evil.

We may go further: such a disposition encourages one to some degree of hope. Indeed, the anticipation of falling again is not a certainty, and to stop at a pessimistic conclusion is to misjudge both grace and the will itself.

Grace is not always given to the same extent. Will not God hereafter send more powerful aids? Will He not so order circumstances as to make sinning impossible?

May not the will itself end by taking a fresh lease of life? Will not the little means made use of succeed in effecting a cure? Will there not be finally a triumphant rebellion against these endless falls? Will not contact with the sacraments secretly touch your weakness at last? Will not the prayers

go on mounting up till they end by turning the scale?—Prayer is the cry of a child; will the Heavenly Father remain ever unheeding His child's unceasing humility and tears?

Lastly, is not this real, though feeble, regret a supernatural thing, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and therefore meritorious? It comes from God, and if He has not hitherto made it efficacious, who can say that it is not because He wishes to build up a high and strong spiritual life on the indispensable basis of prolonged humiliations?

IV.—Satisfaction

1. Its office misunderstood.

This part of the sacrament of Penance is perhaps more important from the practical point of view, for it is the sanction* of the divine law, as prison and fines are the sanctions of human law.

In our days, is it not almost misunderstood and abandoned?

It is made to consist solely in the penance imposed by the confessor, and this penance, which might and should include the payment of our debts and the remedy of our sins, is usually reduced to a short prayer, without the faithful thinking of setting

* "Sanction" is here used in the legal sense of a penalty giving authority to a law and helping its fulfilment.—Translator's Note.

themselves any works of personal expiation in view of such satisfaction.

In the primitive Church, penance had this twofold object: to wipe out the debt entirely, and to make efficacious reparation of the disorders that sin leaves behind it; and rigorous measures were employed, such as make us shudder.

The days which preceded our own still retained something of this holy strictness, and priests often used penances of a remedial character. For a sensual life they prescribed fasts and mortifications; for a frivolous life, a rule and prayers; for selfishness, alms and the like.

These strict penances have fallen into desuetude. The waning of Christian vigour could not endure them. Confessors have had to choose a lesser evil. If they prescribed them, they ran the risk of seeing them left undone (but penance is an integral part of the sacrament); or else, they might keep souls away from the confessional to their own great hurt.

To-day, happily, Holy Church can reckon on a large number of really generous souls, who are capable of making a reaction, and who are, perhaps, only waiting for the signal. Many would answer to it with advantage under wise direction; what is to prevent them from themselves taking the initiative in demanding it?

2. THE DESIRABLE PART IT HAS TO PLAY.

Let us define what is comprised in satisfaction.

It may be summed up under these three heads : restitution, expiation, restoration.

1. *Restitution* concerns our neighbour, and belongs to the virtue of justice.

2. *Expiation* has reference to God, and is inspired by the virtues of *penitence* and filial love.

3. *Restoration* is concerned with our spiritual life impaired by sin, and depends upon the virtues of *prudence* and *zeal*. It is under this third head that we are now to consider it.

1. *The restoration of the soul.*—Sin always results in disorder, more or less extended, more or less deep :—disorder round about us, and in our means of approaching God : we have deranged them ;—disorder within us, in the impairment or weakening of our natural powers : we have made ourselves less apt to correspond with supernatural graces.

This evil, or rather this root of evil, is not affected by absolution, and if the penance imposed is trifling, it is allowed to continue in its entirety. It is a disfigurement and, above all, a danger ; are we to understand that we are not bound to fight against it ?

To restore our spiritual life, we must begin by withdrawing from all *dangerous circumstances* by the necessary renunciations ; and then we must place ourselves in *favourable conditions* by a wise plan ; we must also learn to *rule* ourselves, and endeavour to *train* ourselves.

2. *The part of the confessor and of the soul in this restoration.*—This restoration is a long and difficult struggle. If it is carried on without order, it remains without result; and constant unsuccess wearies good-will. To point out this order and to sustain these efforts God has given us confession, which, by its remedial penances, prescribes remedies and develops energy ; but if to this help, which belongs rightly to the sacrament, is added direction, which is normally adapted to it, the restoration of the spiritual life becomes assured.

This little book is like a *spiritual directory*, but it makes no pretence of taking the place of the *direction of the priest*. It proposes to come to his assistance, and, if direction is unobtainable, to supply it.

The priest and the penitent each has his part ; but often the priest is obliged to step outside the limits of his own.

The principal part of the penitent is no doubt to discover his soul to the eyes of the confessor ; but there is another, which is far less understood, and this is the part of taking

the *initiative*. Too often he leaves this to the director on the ground of obedience, but really through lack of will-power. This is not the right order.

There are, indeed, two initiatives which ought regularly to precede that of the priest: that of the Holy Ghost and that of the penitent. It is to the soul that the Holy Ghost ordinarily communicates His intentions and will. The soul is penetrated with them: she makes them her own, and, on this ground, she submits them to the priest, whose part now becomes supreme. It is he who has to declare if such and such a thought comes from God, or if it arises from the imagination; it is also he who has to shed the light of his learning upon views which are often confused, and to guide uncertain resolutions with the rules he gathers from experience.

He is there, too, to encourage, to sustain, and to uplift; but he will carefully respect the initiative of the Holy Ghost, and also that of the soul. For the soul has an individuality. Gifted with powers that demand activity, she develops and increases her vigour with exercise. In the last resort, none is so near her as she is to herself for self-knowledge, and none is more interested than she in coming to a right decision.

Doubtless, this nearness affords a constant risk of making mistakes; but obedience is there to prevent them, and such is the part

it has to play. Let not the soul, therefore, limit herself to a timid expectancy; but let her follow without fear an initiative that is ready to obey. This method will afford her the means of doing so by the many ideas it will suggest.

While simply useful to those who have a true director, it becomes almost a necessary help to those without one. To know the defects and qualities of one's nature, the means of recovery, the rules of the holy struggle, the stages of advancement, that is just what they require, and that is just what this simple and clear method affords.

FROM LUKEWARMNESS TO FERVOUR

LUKEWARMNESS IN GENERAL

i. The idea elucidated.—ii. Its signs.—iii. Its kinds. —iv. Its causes.—v. Its treatment, or reform of the will and nature.

I

Its Idea

First, let us understand clearly what lukewarmness means. Too many confused ideas darken what is, after all, a very simple matter. Let us take away from the lukewarm the dangerous obsession of the fear: I feel that I am lukewarm, and therefore God has cast me off. On those alone who are really unfaithful, will fall the whole weight of the heavy threats uttered against such persons.

Here, as in all other cases, confusion arises from not distinguishing the various meanings the words possess, and the specific differences belonging to the ideas.

1. The first idea that can be deduced from the word "lukewarmness" is the lack of *relish* and *spirit*. But this want of relish and spirit may result from some superficial cause, or from one that is deeper. It may be transi-

tory or habitual, involuntary or blameworthy.

Hence, the notion it conveys cannot be a definition : the state it implies may be met with alike in the fervent and in the lukewarm.

Hence, there is no need to be alarmed by the mere fact that one is subject to such unhappy impressions.

2. The idea of lukewarmness becomes more definite, when to the notion of languor is added that of *negligence* or of *slackness*. Here there is a defect of will, a diminution of activity, a state for which we are responsible.

But here, again, we must distinguish between negligence and negligence. That which concerns what belongs to *perfection* cannot be compared with that which belongs to *positive duties ;* so, too, negligence may be more or less conscious, more or less extensive, more or less prolonged. What kind of negligence, then, characterizes true lukewarmness ? It is that which amounts to *venial sin.*

3. Thus, the notion of lukewarmness always implies the notion of sin ; venial sin specifies it, and consequently enables us to differentiate it from merely seeming lukewarmness. Does it follow that one is lukewarm as soon as one has committed some venial sin ? But even those who are perfect are not exempt from venial sin ! Hence,

venial sin is not its distinctive sign, but the *facility* with which venial sin is committed, the *habit* of it, and, above all, *attachment* thereto. The lukewarm let themselves go without resistance in this sort of sin, have no remorse about it, and end by quiet acquiescence in it.

4. From this *distinctive* idea of lukewarmness let us go on to the *positive* notion of it: thus we shall get to the root of the matter. Venial sin, when easily and habitually committed, is not only a sign, it is the outcome of an existing state; here venial sin reveals a profound deterioration of vital principles. These vital principles are the *will* and the *moral nature.*

The will is not determined to keep the whole of the divine law: or, if it is determined to observe it, it has not the strength to do so. Hence, there is some vitiation of the power on which the control of our actions depends: it is tainted with *rebellion* or *slackness.*

Our moral nature consists in the whole of our good or bad inclinations, innate or acquired; it is the latent principle that urges us in the direction of good or evil. Here, it is in the direction of evil, for lukewarmness allows the most active of our unfortunate tendencies to develop, and ends by further creating fresh ones. Certain defective acts, which were originally no more than fugitive

accidents, develop into habits, that is to say, into tyrannies which are more or less powerful.

An *enfeebled will*, an *impaired moral nature*, such are at the root of the state of lukewarmness. What a sad outlook do they afford! How is the ascendency of the will to be restored? How is our nature to be set up again? How are we to rise to a life of fervour?

II

Its Signs

In the light of these ideas, it will be easy for you to see whether you are really in a state of lukewarmness.

1. You only feel cold, dry, indifferent, but you remain faithful to your duties and your pious practices: then you may reassure yourself, this is not lukewarmness.

It is, perhaps, the involuntary burden of human weakness which grows weary of restraint, or else, as frequently happens, the result of your physical condition, or else you are engrossed by some anxiety, or overwhelmed with constant work—in a word, it is a trial brought about by secondary causes ordained by God. Whether the state be transitory or prolonged, or even if it be complicated with a few slight frailties, yet if,

after all, you remain faithful on the whole, set your mind at ease.

2. But if you fall away from some of your improving practices ; if you fulfil some of your pious exercises carelessly ; if you even allow yourself to be carried away into some venial sins by surprise or sudden impulse : are you then in a state of lukewarmness ? Let us see.

If you do not act thus *habitually*, if these failings only occur in a fugitive way, and you recover your self-possession afterwards ; no, you are not in a *state* of lukewarmness : your will and your moral nature have not lost their vitality. It is one thing to fail accidentally, another to fail from lack of activity.

3. Nevertheless, these passing languors and this negligence are to be dreaded. If they do not constitute lukewarmness, they are like it and suggest it. If they do not lead on to it definitely, they predispose towards it, for they are, after all, a source of weakness : and once on the slope, it is easy to descend.

But, above all, consider the *quality* of your reaction against them. If it is weak, beware ; if it is vigorous, be glad ; for not only does it stay you from sliding down the lukewarm slope, but, what is far more important, it urges you towards progress ; for such a reaction is a live effort, tending to grow stronger in proportion to your needs.

III

Its Kinds

From these ideas it follows that the notion of lukewarmness must not be confined to the notion of relapse.

1. Relapse is, indeed, lukewarmness; it possesses all its characteristics, but it adds thereto a special deformity, the abandonment of a higher state: it is a falling away. The soul had entered into the divine intimacy, and now she has come away from it; she had strength of wing to soar and generosity of heart to sacrifice herself. Her zeal had, perhaps, inflamed others. And now her ardour is dead, her heart is cold, her wing is weary, her life and goodness are sadly *relaxed*.

This falling away is more than a deformity, it is an immense danger. Where will the defection stop, if it is already extensive? The soul is without strength, and God has left her. It is in this class that we find worn-out and warped souls.

2. The lukewarmness of those who have never been fervent may be as deep, but it can never be as refractory. Here, the abuse of graces is less formal, and the hardening of conscience is less advanced. Doubtless, as in the case of the former, they are without

relish, and wanting in prayer and in filial affection; but these are delights they have never known. Brought up without any training in piety, and having never experienced that sort of life, they keep a kind of youthfulness. As the flowers of divine grace have never bloomed in their hearts, they have not been able to wither in them; and as the joys of piety have never awakened in their souls, they have been unable to die in them. For them there is no disenchantment, none of the faintness that follows upon excessive abuse, none of the instinctive aversion that is felt towards what one has betrayed. If the light but dawn in their heaven, if the beauties of the faith and the sweetness of hope do but come to deck their brows, the spring may yet begin to invade the depths of their winter.

3. Because there is a special lukewarmness belonging to quarters in which religious indifference prevails, it is not necessary to infer that lukewarmness belongs generally to ordinary Christians who confine themselves to the religious practices which are strictly obligatory: daily prayer, weekly Mass and abstinence, Easter confession and communion, etc.

In making these practices binding, the Church intends to secure the minimum necessary for the maintenance of the spiritual life, and, as a matter of fact, many Christians

who are satisfied with these preserve sound health of soul. In their case, life has little intensity, but it is regular; their love for religion may not be ardent, but it is serious. Doubtless, they have only a confused idea of religious truths, and God seems to them a rather far-away Being; but they are faithful to what they know, and if they do not know more, it is often because Providence intentionally spares them from being discouraged by a view of perfection which they would be actually incapable of attaining.—Moreover, amongst them it is not uncommon to find souls that are simply admirable. In their rudimentary notions of the faith and in their modest practices, they find the sustenance of a real fervour. Do we not see some of the poor, who have only a little bread to live on, possessed of perfect health?

IV

Its Causes

All life languishes if it is *insufficiently nourished*, or if it is *impaired in its sources*; and hence there are two very distinct sorts of causes to be analyzed.

i. Our life consists of thoughts, feelings, and actions. If there be nothing to enlighten our intelligence, we are in darkness; if there be nothing to warm our hearts, it is

winter with us; if nothing arouse our activity, we are benumbed. Now, the lukewarm hardly draw anything from the sacred springs from which flow light, heat and life. They pray little or ill. The truths of the faith leave them unmoved.

No doubt, strictly speaking, the observance of obligatory religious duties (the usual prayers, Sunday Mass, yearly communion) may be enough to prevent this extreme coldness. But this only on two conditions; the first is, that these duties be fulfilled with *good-will* and *care*, without which they would afford no nourishment. The second is, that one find one's self in circumstances that are peculiarly favourable by *nature* and *position*, without which these very scanty helps would be an inadequate protection. Are such conditions often to be met with?

On the other hand, note well, life, even vegetable life, is not a permanent state; it is an unceasing renewal and a perpetual struggle with death. In our bodily life, if we do not react against the innumerable causes that sometimes surround and attack us, we lose our health, and often life itself. Weakened constitutions are the first to succumb, because they bring smaller powers of resistance to the fray and afford a more favourable ground to their assailants.

And the spiritual life is subject to the same laws. It is invaded by all sorts of dangerous

germs : false notions, bad examples, subtle or violent temptations : so many various kinds of leaven from which one must guard one's self, or against which one must react. But, in this state, vitality is extremely weak, and the means of preservation are almost non-existent.

ii. Lukewarmness predisposes one to be invaded by every kind of disorder ; but these disorders are often themselves the cause of lukewarmness. Indeed, every disorder disturbs life in its working and dissipates its energies. Certain disorders go so far as to cause a radical deterioration of its fundamental principles.

1. A passion gets such a hold of the mind, heart and life as to absorb their activity : often it goes so far as to create a distaste for the things of God first, and sometimes for everything else.

2. It stirs up feelings and acts which offend God and drive Him away, and this means the abuse of graces received.

3. Conscience contradicts itself and looks for mean excuses, and loses its uprightness.

4. Lastly, if the state is prolonged, one's powers are so impaired as to be incapable of any resistance.

V

Its Treatment

Two essential duties are binding on the lukewarm.

The first is to *become detached from the evil*, and to break with it. The second is to *reform nature*.—Detachment from the evil is secured by contrition, which changes the dispositions of the will.—Reformation of life is effected by means of firm purpose and satisfaction.

i. *The Reform of the Will*.—It is *contrition* that breaks down evil dispositions of will and begins to cure it.

Our nature no doubt keeps its defects; unhappy habits, ever active, remain like forces always ready to break out anew. Certainly, this is altogether unhealthy; but no cure can begin, unless it commences with the will. Hence, it is upon this master-faculty that our action must be brought to bear, by *detaching* it from what is evil.

But this detachment cannot be effected by way of authority, it can only be achieved by inspiring the will with repulsion, aversion, and horror, if possible. But these impressions are themselves the result of *reasons* and *feelings* strongly conceived. The reasons are called *motives*, and the feelings *motions* or *incentives*.

Motives of personal interest are usually those which make most impression upon the lukewarm; but there are certain natures which are very susceptible to the influences of the feelings.

1. *The Motives of Personal Interest* may be reduced to the consideration of the great truths: death, judgment, heaven, hell; the abuse of graces, etc.

You say: "I know all this from childhood up; I have been steeped in it in all my retreats; it is stale: it will not touch me at all."

I reply: "You forget the grace which is *specially* due to you in the sacrament for which you are preparing. Being bound to repent, you have a *strict right* to receive the graces which will inspire you with repentance, even if you have previously abused them."

Take one of the many well-written books which deal with these matters—for instance, the *Think Well on It.* Read a passage of it attentively; do not allow yourself to stop from distaste or weariness. Say to yourself from time to time that all this is quite true; that hell, although one shuns the thought of it, is a reality, and a terrible reality; that you have no particular guarantee that you will escape it; that the path that you are treading borders this abyss. . . .

2. *The Incentives of Feeling* comprise everything in religion which appeals to the noble

and tender and generous instincts of our nature. Why should you not try to find them above all in Calvary ?

So much love emanates from these ever-touching memories :—they seem to be impregnated with grace !—Take a book written by a Saint ; fix your attention on what he points out to you,—become, if you can, a witness of the Passion, look long upon the love and agony of Jesus.—Think, too, that this is all real,—that this loving One suffered for you, and, alas ! through you ; that He has denied you nothing, while you are hesitating about making a just resolution, and over a few simple efforts.

" That will do me no good," say you ; " I know it all by heart ! How empty seem these great and affecting truths !"

No, no, a thousand times, they are full of power ! No, no, you do not know yourself ! Deep in everyone who has been baptized there is an attraction to Jesus which may be sleeping : awaken it.—If, as you meditate on these sublime episodes, you experience a feeling of weariness, think that it comes from the devil, and make haste to get rid of it : read, and reflect *nevertheless ;* force yourself to understand ; mentally kiss the wounds which plead for repentance ; go right to the heart that is more hurt by ingratitude than by the lance. Lastly, if you come to understand that this Jesus loves you notwithstand-

ing the wrongs you have done Him, you will feel that it is an evil thing to make Him suffer, and that it would be unjust to doubt Him.—The nearness of His blood, which is about to be shed upon you in the tribunal of penance, will already affect your preparation so far as you lend your co-operation.

3. *Motives of Contrition drawn from the State of Lukewarmness.*—Besides the great truths of Our Lord's Passion on which you will meditate, you may with usefulness run through such reflections as are suggested by your state. They are those that we have already outlined, because they are peculiar to it, and because they make directly for a cure (see pp. 21-36).

ii. *The Reform of Our Nature.*—How unthinking is the human mind! If we happen to discern our sins with greater clearness, we think we have changed, and then we readily cease our efforts; but we are still more prone to do so, if our contrition is keen.

"No, this time I shall certainly not fall!"—You say it, and you mean it, but what does your experience prove? What does the simplest reflection enable you to discover? That your previous bad dispositions are merely *disavowed*, and that they *live on* in a state of latency. This is because the will resolves in vain, for it is radically *weak*. If one does not *set to work* upon this condition of

things, one will have cut with the past without making sure of the future.

Hindrances and dangers remain, and will rise up to-morrow, perhaps, against our halting resolutions. This is because the languor, which has become a second nature to you, will soon prove rebellious against your efforts. You are reckoning upon the new desire for piety which has just awakened in you ; but, pray, look well. So far, it is only a little light which a puff may put out, a flower which has just blossomed beneath a chilly sky, only too ready to die of frost. Everything within you is uncertain and precarious Do not trust simple desires and vague resolutions. Your evil is a *chronic ill*, which requires definite treatment and long patience. The treatment we can offer you ; but we look to your wisdom for the patience.

This treatment is no *novelty*, but the judicious use of a great remedy instituted by God to heal us, and it is called " confession."

" *You ask, and receive not : because you ask amiss,*" says the Apostle. You go to confession, and you get no better, we may say here, because you confess amiss. You are not practical ; you spend your time in hunting for a number of failings which are more or less blameworthy ; you read a few acts of contrition, more or less suited to your state, and then, without any real conviction, you make a confused resolve not to sin again.

Do you know what you are doing? You are merely marking time.—Set aside this routine way of doing things, which is only a form of inertia; and resolutely apply to confession the happy method of the particular examen.

It may be summed up in these words: *specialize your efforts.* Multiplicity creates confusion and disperses energy. The old proverb is well known: it says: "Grasp all, lose all." And would you try to comprise all your sins in your endeavours? If your ambition were more modest, you would attain better results. "If we were to remedy one of our defects every year," says the writer of the *Imitation*, "we should soon reach perfection."

"But," you will reply, "if I only attend to one defect, I shall give a free rein to all the rest." By no means. They are affected indirectly, and what does the manner in which they are affected signify? When one point claims our notice, our attention becomes more wide-awake, and it instinctively seizes upon everything that goes on within its range. Moreover, our good-will possesses more decision, and thus extends its influence *for the good* as a whole.

To specialize our efforts is to choose a very definite object, which will be very simple and easy to keep under observation. When this object is such as to exercise a decisive influence over our moral life, we have reached

the ideal of the sphere we are studying.—The object will often be a defect to fight against, or a quality to cultivate, which comes to the same thing. It may even be some simple practice, a reminder intended to warn or arouse or sustain us.

It goes without saying, that confession must not be restricted solely to this object. All serious sins must be confessed and regretted ; but the object of our special struggle will remain the centre of our deliberations.

These general notions, which apply to all states of lukewarmness or of relapse, will be found in the two degrees of lukewarmness that we are about to study : the state of *extreme lukewarmness*, and the state of *lesser lukewarmness*.—They occur, just as all the characters of the genus occur in the species, with the differences that specialize them. Hence, we shall not be surprised at certain repetitions : they result from the nature of things.

FIRST STATE

EXTREME LUKEWARMNESS

I

Characteristics and Causes

I.—CHARACTERISTICS

i. External characteristics.—ii. Theological characteristics, in relation to—1. mortal sin; 2. venial sin; 3. spiritual activity.

I

Descriptive Characteristics.

1. This kind of lukewarmness is found first of all in those who, so far as religious duties are concerned, fulfil only the most essential, and have neither piety nor delicacy of conscience towards God. If they avoid grave sins, it is rather because their nature and their life do not expose them to such, or else because their natural honesty is a check upon them; the fear of hell may, however, have something to do with it.

But should they happen to fall into some grave sin, they confess it, yet do not seek to get rid of the causes which have brought about their fall. With this exception, they are singularly like those who live without

any religion, especially those who do not practise, although they have not lost, the faith.

2. The same kind of lukewarmness is met with in those who, by position or habit, keep up certain exercises of piety, but do so without love or any real earnestness. Like the former, if they do not fall into grave sins, they owe it to circumstances, and if they fall into them, they find in their confessions, perhaps forgiveness, but no remedy.

II

Theological Characteristics.

Before going back to the causes of this state, let us analyze its distinguishing characteristics.

1. *With Regard to Mortal Sin.*—There is no real horror of mortal sin so far as it is an offence against God. By the word "horror," we do not here mean the vigorous repulsion that presupposes a very hearty spiritual life, but only an earnest dislike, which is charac teristic of anyone who seriously desires to remain in a state of grace.

Being indifferent and full of weariness, those in this state are perpetually on the verge of real defection. If they keep a kind of relish and affection for certain things that are seriously wrong, they are straightway at the mercy of any occasion that may arise.

Moreover, this unhealthy taste is a perpetual incentive towards what is evil. But if the liking goes so far as to be a formal desire; if, under some vague yearning lurks the expectation of an occasion, this would mean more than an *affection* for sin, it would be a *will* to sin; it would no longer be a risk, but a fall: to will a sin is to commit it within one's self.

Hence, it is necessary to distinguish the true sense of these three words, which are so different in themselves and in their effects: attraction, affection, will.

Attraction to what is wrong, is the liking one has for it. This liking is the outcome of our natural dispositions or of temptation. However keen and persistent it may be, in itself it cannot be sinful; Saints have sometimes experienced its fascination.

Affection for what is wrong is also an attraction, but an attraction *imprudently retained* and *cherished*. It implies a certain amount of complicity of conscience. This disposition constitutes an intermediate state between simple attraction and consent. It comprises much of nature and more or less of will. It is a failing, but an incomplete one; an unhealthy liking, of which one is unwilling entirely to get rid; an unrestraint that is still cherished, though feebly.

"They intend not to sin any more," says St. Francis of Sales, "but with a certain

reluctance they feel at having to deprive and draw themselves away from the unhappy enjoyments of sin . . . they abstain from sin like sick folk refrain from melons ; they do not eat, because the doctor threatens them with death if they partake : but they are worried at having to abstain ; they discuss it, and try to see if a bargain can be made ; they like to smell the melons, and think those lucky who are able to eat them."

Thus, it is having an affection to sin, if we turn in this fashion towards what is forbidden and look at it furtively before turning away from it. We also have an affection to sin, if we wish that what is wrong were not wrong ; if, for instance, we were to say to ourselves— " Oh, how I wish it were not a mortal sin !"

Who does not perceive the danger of such a disposition ? The line between affection for what is wrong and the *will* to do it, is as difficult to draw as it is easy to cross; and then, note this well, it is a real temptation perpetually entertained.

2. *With Regard to Venial Sin.*—In the lukewarm who make nothing of it, *venial sin* reigns without either *resistance* or *reaction.*

What is to be noted in the case of these sins is not their number or gravity, but the *facility* with which they are committed. Indeed, the number and gravity may depend upon the occasions, while the facility depends upon our dispositions.

Venial sins are those which are voluntary, formal, and without remorse. A conscience which does not shrink from them sometimes loses any clear idea of them.

3. *With Regard to Spiritual Activity.*—Nothing is more characteristic of this kind of lukewarmness than a *want of spiritual activity.*

The least effort in this order of things is felt to cost too much, and there is nothing that urges on the making of an endeavour. Such means may be suggested as books, preaching, confession; but they are used carelessly or soon abandoned.

The soul scarcely feels any desire to change and is never tormented by it. She has no liking or desire for the things of God. Such an appetite is a sign of health.

Conclusion.—The lukewarm person of this type is without any energy and lets himself go. His life is at the lowest level, languishing and precarious.—At a *low level*, since he is satisfied with escaping mortal sin and does not try to rid himself of the affection for it, and he thinks nothing of venial sin.—*Languishing*, like the sick man who is incapable of any sustained effort.—*Precarious*, because his life is exposed to all sorts of surprises from occasions of sin, and to an ultimate relapse.

It is plain that here we have to do with lukewarmness of the most pronounced type.

II.—CAUSES

What has been said (pp. 112-114) as to the general causes of lukewarmness here finds its formal application, so far as it concerns, either the want of spiritual nourishment, or the principles of deterioration. We shall not repeat these remarks.

I

If insufficiency of nourishment is capable of inducing lukewarmness, what is to be said when nourishment is entirely wanting?

Barely a few short and badly said prayers, morning and evening.—No religious reading or examination of conscience.—No thoughts of God during the day.—No spirit of faith in the circumstances of life.—If a few of these practices are still retained, they are done carelessly, and contribute no nutritive element.

II

There is little that is reassuring in the moral situation of such a person. It is the result of the nature of the individual and of the conditions of his life, for his rule is to live at haphazard. And now let us review the causes of deterioration that most frequently bring on lukewarmness, or singularly aggravate it. As they are less abstract than principles, their signs are more easily recognized.

1. *Dangerous Affections.*—Does any affection disturb the heart? It is fed by remembrance, by fancy, and by recurring hopes. A host of subtle temptations arouse it. Desperate depression follows upon childish delight; jealousy adds reproaches to bitterness, and often fatal discords to these inner disturbances.

In all this, there are sins anticipated and voluntary, despite a sort of conventional disavowal; and when a soul is thus deeply obsessed and engrossed, what moral sensibility remains to enable her to feel a horror of venial sin and to be touched with a sense of the divine displeasure? She does not even think of her own immediate personal interests, or despise them. Her whole life is spent in these foolish vagaries.

The same is true of letting one's self go with regard to certain bad thoughts and still more regrettable habits.—There follows a cloying of the soul, a darkening of the conscience, a deadness to the things of God, a giving up of prayer, and discouragement: such are the direct results.

2. *Aversions.*—An opposite passion, that of aversion, leads to the same decadence, and that by means of similar disorders: engrossment of the spirit, perversion of the feelings, abandonment of God.

Such and such an one with whom it is your duty to live has become intolerable to you.

The sight of him, the sound of his voice, even his kindnesses, if he shows you any, get upon your nerves. You do nothing to master your bad disposition; far from it, you seem to encourage it at will, thinking over all the painful memories, letting unfortunate impressions win upon you more and more, and enjoying the bitterness of your hatred. Then there are violent scenes in your little inner world; you bring graphically before your imagination anything that stirs your indignation, and you exclaim to yourself: "I will say this, or do that to him!"

Then you should avoid ill-natured thoughts with regard to him, attacks upon his reputation, anything that causes division or discord. —And sometimes the person is someone whom it is our duty to love, often a superior who ought at any rate to be respected.

3. *Bad Dispositions as to the Faith.*— Though not so frequent, this is a disorder that generates the same sort of moral weakening. One is disturbed by doubts, one allows one's self to take part in talk that may make them stronger.—One judges the Pope, the Church, the clergy and religious associations, with a bitter partiality.—In the reading of history, one specially dwells upon the darker side.—One is discouraged by hostile attacks and by the shortcomings of the faithful. And these reflections accompany one at all times: in one's prayers, which are filled with

discouragement ; in one's actions, which grow slack and hesitating.

This disposition, which is often the result of one's turn of mind and surroundings, would only be a trial, if it were purely involuntary ; but, if it be *imprudently entertained*, it produces a sort of impotence to will or to pray, against which there is no attempt to react. Venial sins then lose their importance, and spiritual activity gets a drag put upon it. In this state, the soul is ill-defended against herself or any dangerous complication that may arise.

4. *Vanity.*—Vanity, when it becomes dominant, also dries up all the sources of the spritual life.

The desire to please, always on the watch, takes up all our solicitude. Sometimesthe innumerable futilities of the toilet and dressing take possession of one, sometimes alternations of success and disappointment bring alternations of delight and vexation, but always disturbance. Countless petty trickeries swarm in the mind and spoil the heart.

What room is left for thoughts that neither flatter nor come of their own accord ; for the *unseen*, which requires to be perpetually fostered ; for the pious practices that run somewhat counter to our nature, and which have yet to be sustained ? Conscience is forgotten and our powers of resistance get exhausted ; and general frivolity reigns in our lives.

5. *Discouragement.*—The soul has made an effort, and has fallen away. Nor has it occurred once only; but the relapses have been frequent.—"God is forsaking me," she exclaims, "all my endeavours will be labour in vain!"

If, in confession, the penitent agrees to resume his exercises of piety, and to make some fresh effort, consent is given without conviction; he goes his way like someone who is certain beforehand that he will soon leave off, without liking or confidence, and consequently, without any vigour. It is not merely falling back into the same sins that produces this depression: but it is also the result of the return of the same difficulties, repugnances and temptations. It is likewise the lowering effect of all failures, disappointments and misfortunes.

There is nothing more common, nothing more dangerous, nothing worse than discouragement. It is one of Satan's triumphs and one of the commonest of his wiles. Imperfect souls let themselves be taken in by them, not only once, but hundreds of times, and always in the same way.*

NOTE.—Examples might be multiplied; these may suffice, since they are the commonest, and also, they show the line to follow in finding fresh applications.

* Under the heading "Relapse," the subject is dealt with thoroughly, with reasons for confidence that never fails.

II

Treatment

It has been shown that the causes of lukewarmness may be reduced to two: *insufficiency of nourishment*, or *impairment* of life. Hence their direct treatment is found naturally in the two words, *nourishment* and *reformation*. In the order of things human, the aids would be confined to these; in the order of grace, *mercy* intervenes. Sometimes the latter likes to work unaided, or in response to the mere appeal of our wretchedness.

A Very Important Piece of Advice.

Look for a confessor who will take an interest in you. Without help, you run a great risk of not persevering long. When one is one's own sole judge, and has to rely on one's own strength only, one has no serious check.

The advice of your confessor, his authority, the necessity of rendering him an account, have quite another value. This is why God has made the confession of sins obligatory; this, too, is why He gives the priest the insight and the affection of a father.

I. NOURISHMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Morning and evening prayers.—ii. Offering one's heart to God. Grace at meals.—iii. Evening examination of conscience.—iv. Sunday Mass. —v. Confession and Communion.—vi. Spiritual reading.—vii. Honesty and the supernatural

i. Begin by saying your *morning and evening prayers* better. Let them be no longer the routine fulfilment of a wearisome obligation, the unconscious recitation of the most beautiful forms that human lips can utter; let them be, indeed, earnest speech addressed to God, true prayer coming from the heart.—Never kneel down without thinking that you are being given an *audience* by the highest Majesty. Always take up a suitable posture. If you lean against anything, do not do it indolently: a free-and-easy manner would be out of place. No doubt the soul's homage is the essential thing, but bodily homage completes it and sustains it.

How many days, how many weeks, perhaps, go by without a prayer like this! But then, on what has your soul been living, and how can you be astonished, after all, if you are without any interest, or desire, or life; if, in fact, you are lukewarm? You are like the poor little badly-fed children, who, without being ill, are so pale that one is sorry to look at them, and so weak that they can hardly stand.

ii. Resume or revive the little practices which are so familiar to all good Christians, and which are such a help to prayer: the offering of one's heart to God, and Grace before and after meals.

You do not make this *offering of your heart* morning and evening. Yet your mother taught you to do this, and your happy childhood fell asleep and awoke under this heavenly ray. And if you have still kept up the custom, yet, in a lukewarm soul, it can only be a vain habit. Put life into it, transform it, make it a daily act of love, a real direction of your intentions. "Thy will be done! Glory be to Thee, O God! O my God, here is the heart of Thy child!"

In most quarters, even if they are Christian, the use of *Grace* before and after meals has fallen into desuetude. It is a shame. Bind yourself to this practice; establish it in your family as a real source of blessing and as a permanent lesson in the spirit of faith. Do not be too afraid of keeping it up when away from home. Is it not right to pay God everywhere the tribute we owe Him, and would it not be a grand thing to restore such a duty to honour once more? No doubt, there must be no affectation, but neither must there be any pusillanimity. If, in some company, this simple act were to make you conspicuous, or to provoke un-

fortunate pleasantries at the expense of religion, you will be satisfied with sending up your prayer to God in silence, and with making a little sign of the cross on your heart; it would be a mute protest and very pleasing to God, and a very efficacious means of implanting the habit deeply within yourself.

iii. How hard it is to get the *evening examination of conscience* to take its place in Christian custom! And yet, can anything be conceived which is more necessary, and which is really more easy? You are ready to cry out on hearing the last remark? What! easy? Is it easy to hunt up one's little sins, little forgetfulnesses, from the time one gets up, through all the numerous occupations of the day, right down to the weary hours before one retires to rest? Can one so far put one's mind on the strain as to reconstruct at the same time both one's material and one's moral life, so as to measure it by the rule of the ten commandments, not to mention the capital sins? Come! come! Do not let us rush into intentional exaggerations. A first-rate examination of conscience does not require so much formality. Let it be elementary and short; that will be enough, but at any rate, it must be serious.

Put yourself two or three questions, the same questions—the most important, as to

sins—the most decisive, as to *means*. Why should they not be a simple summary of our method: 1. Have I fed my spiritual life? 2. Have I kept watch and fought against such and such a failing, which is a hindrance to me? 3. Have I appealed for mercy during the day? Regret—Prayer—Purpose of amendment.

Would you have a very practical help? Put down the three kinds of questions above mentioned in writing, shaping them according to your needs with the addition of a few *personal sub-headings*.—Reading the written questions fixes the attention. One quickly walks along a well-defined road; on the contrary, one lingers and loses the way if one tries to take a cut across country.

iv. *Hearing Mass* on Sunday is a strict duty, and you fulfil it; but how? Do you consider what is going on between heaven and earth, under the roof of this church, on this very altar, by the words and the hands of the priest? Do you take great pains to adore Jesus Christ, just when, at the elevation, He looks down in His living reality upon the bowed heads of the worshippers? Or at least, does the Mass draw from you one explicit act of faith? Does it force from your heart one prayer of trusting confidence? Does it give you one feeling of regret for your sins and your state of lukewarmness?

On the contrary, does it not happen that

you enter the church without really adoring God, that is to say, without offering Him this kind of homage with bent knees and heedful mind? In the world, is not everyone greeted with the respect due to his rank? Is God alone to receive no deference?

Use a book of the Mass; follow the prayers of the Church, the Offices of the season, if possible; or else take some other book of devotion, if you prefer it. Express the thoughts you are impressed with, and if you feel that they are above your actual dispositions, humbly ask for help to attain to them.

But, for heaven's sake, do not resist the divine influences of this great action by behaving at all unworthily under the very eyes of your Lord; by talking and looking about, and by letting your mind wander in keeping with your feeling of irksomeness. Do not fail to adore God once more before you leave Him. What would be thought of a man who went away without bowing to the master of the house?

If you have heard Holy Mass rightly, you will feel more religious, more eager to do good, and even, as experience shows, readier to enjoy lawful pleasures.

v. As to your *confessions*, follow the method put forward in this book. Of all the means, this is the most essential, the most efficacious, and the one which is the mainspring to set in motion all the rest.

Let the lukewarm soul follow it with confidence, and her cure is assured.

As to your *communions*, think them over three days beforehand; lay upon yourself a few additional efforts beyond those you usually make; utter some feelings of desire; try some timid protestations of love for Jesus; and offer a few sacrifices. Every evening, recite the acts before communion, or read a short passage to the same effect.

Adopt a similar course for the days after communion. Really, it would be too sad if Jesus were to be received in total indifference. Would this not be like not going to meet a friend on his arrival, or not even rising in one's place to greet him?

vi. As yet we dare not ask you to *read* a passage daily, and meditate upon it. Nevertheless, consider that your soul is without light and without ardour, and that around you, perhaps, no one to speak to you of *God*, of your soul and the hereafter.

Have a few good books always near you; open them frequently; read at least a few pages. May it soon become a pleasant habit to you. Thus, in the depths of your indifference you will come to catch a few echoes of celestial things.

vii. *An Essential Remark.*—By prayer, reading, and the sacraments, you will draw down upon your soul blessed influences; nevertheless, note well, all these excellent

things are not an end in themselves, but a *means*. You will treat them as an end, if you persuade yourself that your regularity is enough, and that you have no other efforts to make. But you will consider them as a means, when you use them to find a reminder and a power to lead a more seriously Christian life. Distrust the piety of which it may be said : It does not make the soul any loftier, the heart any more loving, the character any more gentle, the actions any more straightforward. Christian life must be before all things perfectly honest.

It becomes *honest* by the faithful performance of every duty : duties of one's state of life, family duties, duties of friendship, duties of personal dignity, charitable duties, and the rest. Everyone should be able to count on your straightforwardness and kindness ; your bearing should be without pretentiousness, your word always true, all your dealings guided by justice and reason.

This honesty of life must be uplifted by *supernatural motives*, and this is what will impart to it both its merit and its crown. In your duties, you will see the will of God ; in circumstances, His providence ; in your sufferings, trials sent by Him. You will ask for courage from the hopes that are given you from on high, and, in case of need, for help from fear of eternal punishment. Above all, you will cultivate the filial habit

of serving God for His own sake, seeking to give Him pleasure and desiring to win His love.

This life is easy because it is beautiful and pleasant. It is all this, because God always uplifts it with His special graces, and often favours it with His consolations.

II. FIGHTING THE CAUSES THAT IMPAIR THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

The want of nourishment reduces the soul to a state of lukewarmness by inanition. Certain failings induce lukewarmness by the *perturbation* they bring about. Our failings dwell in our moral nature and impair it in its foundations. They constitute real propensities towards evil.

People are much more anxious about their sins than about their failings, and they are so illogical that they do not think of tracing the effect to its cause. Your lukewarmness does not arise from your committing such and such sins, but because you *retain the failing* that makes you commit them. The sin is here the indicatory sign to put you on the right track; but it will be in vain that you learn to know all your sins, for you will not escape from lukewarmness, unless you go back to their source.

You must then look deeper, you must find the root-failing of your condition. Often it

becomes obvious on the least reflection; but people still go on in lukewarmness with their eyes shut and in indifference! We noted in their place those defects that give rise to extreme lukewarmness, we shall now point out the remedies that are calculated to cure them.

i. *Remedies for Disturbing Affections.*

Our affections exercise such a preponderating influence over our lives that on their prudent or imprudent management depends the good or evil state of the soul. There would be much to say on such a subject, but the scope of this book confines us within narrow limits. Happily the Doctor of piety, in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*, has treated it with all the depth and delicacy that it demands (Part III., ch. ix. and ff.). To this we refer our readers, being satisfied to submit to them a few of the most essential passages:

"If you have already allowed your heart to be taken in the nets of bad affections, O God, how difficult will it be for you to escape from them! Throw yourself at the feet of His divine Majesty; in His presence acknowledge the depths of your wretchedness and weakness and vanity. Next, call upon your heart to make the greatest effort of which it

is capable to detest the friendship you have begun, and to renounce the evidences of it that you have given, to break off all the engagements you have undertaken, and to make a strong and absolute resolution never to form such ties."

"I cry aloud to all who will listen: prune, cut, resolve; do not trifle with attempts to undo these foolish friendships or to untie their bonds; you must be quick to apply to them both sword and fire. We must not palter with a love that is contrary to the love of God. . . . But if your repentance is not strong enough to tear these bad inclinations from your heart by the roots, here are the rules you must follow: make yourself, in the way I have taught you, an interior solitude, and, by the earnest yearnings of your soul, repeated over and over again, renounce all these inclinations and all the inroads which you feel they make upon your heart. Give more time to reading good books; go more frequently to confession; communicate according to your needs, and according to the advice of your director; reveal to him, or to some prudent and discreet person, your troubles, your intentions, and all your dispositions, with all humility and sincerity."

The same kind of perturbation may be produced by imprudences of an analogous

character, such as loose talk, dangerous reading and dubious reveries. These deviations arouse one's attention less, and do not alarm the conscience as much as they should : and yet they are sometimes not less upsetting.

You will say to yourself, It is merely a distraction. Rather enquire whether it is not a disorder. After such reading, talk, or reveries, do you find that you have any liking for prayer ? How does the approach of the time of communion affect you ? Do you feel that you belong to God, calm, gentle, and loving ? Oh, no ; heavy indifference weighs you down, and you feel an invincible repugnance towards holy things. Cherish no illusions : such reading and talk and reveries are *perverting you.*

Here again the remedy is clear : you must set yourself free at all costs. You have drunk poison, you feel its deadly influence, and are you still ready to return to the beverage that is killing you ? Will you prefer a few emotions, which, moreover, do you little honour, to calm self-possession, to integrity and purity of soul ? If you do not stop, you will sink little by little to such deadness of conscience that the most powerful threats of religion will be incapable of arousing in you a single fear.

Your indispensable resolution will then be to renounce such reading, talk and reveries,

so far as your proper protection requires. First of all, you will renounce them to obey the call of duty. Just now, the voice of duty is all you have to listen to ; but soon, more gentle tones will echo in your heart when it is set free ; and perhaps, to recompense you for sacrificing such demoralizing pleasures, God will grant you the sanctifying joy of His holy consolation.

ii. *Remedies for Grosser Sins.*

Something must now be said as to those unfortunate habits that degrade one's personal dignity, rob one's will of its strength, destroy one's ideals, and tend to annihilate one's whole being.

Fear and detest these sins : they end by setting up an intolerable tyranny. Repugnance follows in their train. One condemns them : this time they are done with ! Alas ! no, they are not done with. You experience the well-known illusion that comes when the sated appetite shrinks from food. In both cases it is a question of time : soon hunger returns with its gross lust of feeding, and, if it be satisfied, its demands become more imperious. Conscience, health, and hell itself, are like useless spectres ! Black indifference reigns in these lower regions !

Poor victim, if this tyranny makes you despair of yourself, do not let it make you

despair of God. Nothing can resist His power, neither sickness, nor even death itself; but this power, which is in the hands of His mercy, is at the disposal of your good-will. With a feeling of invincible confidence, fly to the remedies which we point out elsewhere; hide yourself under the sheltering mantle of Mary; seek a refuge in the open heart of Jesus; appeal to the fatherhood of God by some filial action; be very humble; be kind to all, especially to the poor.

Drive away the dangerous thoughts that flitter about the threshold of your soul; keep your mind fully occupied; flee from idleness and effeminacy.

Do not lose sight of the binding law of habit; it is built up by the repetition of acts, and it is weakened by *long resistance*. In the last resort, in both cases, it is persevering action that implants or uproots it. Do not be surprised if your recovery is slow, nor if the crises return; this always takes place, and it is to be reckoned on: do not be discouraged at passing falls, and at the recrudescence that they bring with them; nevertheless, fear them greatly, for they tend to make you lose the ground you have gained; and pick yourself up quickly, before the evil, by being allowed to continue, has had time to pass from your will into your nature. Remember that, if you react promptly and

vigorously, you will hasten on your final stability, and that a powerful act of will, in some cases, is enough to establish it.

But, once more, cleave to the means that is dominant over all the rest, because it sets them in motion :—confession. You will tell everything ; you will tell it simply ; you will make known the time the evil has lasted and its depth, your repeated failings, and your resolutions which have been perpetually broken ; your efforts and your discouragement ; your disgust with yourself, and the fine aspirations that still sometimes hover over this slough of despond.

Confession must be frequent, very frequent, even daily, if need be. After every fall, raise yourself immediately by contrition first of all, but also by confession without delay, for you must be on your guard against two contrary, but equally fatal, illusions : I will never fall again ! I shall never be able to rise !

Do not reckon much on yourself without the help of a confessor. It is he who will determine your use of the divine remedy that communion affords, a subtle remedy, which imprudence may render useless ; an all-powerful remedy, when it is used with the proper dispositions.

iii. *Remedies for Aversions.*

The first means is to *shun* all reminders that *entertain* your aversion. Do not allow yourself to dwell upon the wrongs done by this person; do not try to reckon up the motives of his actions, and be on your guard against the mania for analysing his nature and defects.

To *talk about* one's aversions is even more dangerous. A feeling becomes magnified by giving utterance to it. We put more of ourselves into it; and we find, unfortunately, in the pleasing approbation our complaints receive another reason for thinking them well-founded.

The second means consists in *fighting*; but it is wise to use it against one's aversions, only if one is sure enough of one's self to be able to secure a victorious issue. Hence, do not avoid opportunities of seeing such persons and speaking to them. Show amiability without affectation. At the same time, and this is the essential thing, force yourself to enter into the amiable dispositions that you display.

If opportunities are wanting, follow the counsel of Rodriguez: institute a *fictitious* combat. Imagine that the person is there, and that he is in a disagreeable mood, and is saying something that is displeasing to you. On your part, assume a gentle and

kindly disposition, such as you wish to prevail in you, and retain it firmly and calmly in spite of any contrary impression, until the latter appears to be destroyed by the urgency of an energetic act of will.

A third means is to think of the good qualities of the person, and to enumerate them to yourself, and to *dwell upon* them in your mind. In order to follow up this interior effort, find an opportunity of *saying something good* about him that you believe to be true, and say it without any insincere qualifications.

If you have any really felt love for Our Lord, put Him between your heart and the individual you find so aggravating. Determine to act thus whenever you experience a feeling of aversion, and also, by way of precaution, whenever you have to speak of such a person. Banish him from your thoughts, and think only of the adorable person of Jesus Christ. This is a supernatural means, and consequently, a force for good that goes beyond our calculations.

iv. *Remedies for Feelings of Doubt.*

Such impressions, at any rate in our days, are generally due to a kind of intellectual poison. Books, teaching, newspapers and public debates pour out daily floods of unbelief, and infect the very air we breathe.

Novels, which are rightly suspected as being dangerous to our morals, are at least as dangerous to the soundness of our faith. Indeed, they often attack it directly ; but they wage a more perilous war against it by subtle and calculated insinuations, and even by what they systematically exclude. Give your attention to this last remark ; for a novel may be regarded as innocuous from this point of view, because it avoids any religious topic altogether ; but it portrays its heroes as full of the noblest qualities and as achieving prodigies of goodness. The conclusion that creeps in by degrees, without the reader perceiving it, is that religion is really unnecessary, and that man is able to persevere in the fulfilment of every duty and even to rise to heroism by his natural strength, and without grace ; and consequently, without recourse to the sacraments. This is not only an error in contradiction with fact, but also a heresy positively condemned by the Church.

1. If you are subject, in spite of yourself, to impressions of doubt, *keep at a distance* all those causes that give rise to them. You are conscientiously bound to do this as far as you can. Why do you allow yourself to read such and such a book ? Why do you enter upon a discussion that leaves you disturbed ? You are breathing an air which is full of miasma. You are taking a food that is more or less poisonous. Would you

be as careless as to your bodily nourishment? Be logical; fly from contact with some ideas as you would from material contagion; do not shrink from painful sacrifices, if they are necessary.

2. Such is your primary duty; there is another: it is to avoid carefully any fatal *entanglement*. The gravest is that which comes from certain sins. Sins, indeed, and we have said so plainly, are not the primary cause of doubt in our own times; but one has no need to be a great psychologist to understand the influence they may have in inducing or in reviving doubt.

From the point of view of the faith, every sin possesses a peculiar deformity and wears a character of ingratitude. If this point of view is put on one side, sin appears as a weakness that may easily be excused. The desire to feel one's self less contemptible, and the wish to be free to do what one likes, instinctively urge one to adopt a solution which makes one feel innocent and comfortable. Great purity of life spares one the impulse to doubt that comes from dissatisfied pride.

3. May one lay down an absolute rule that doubts should always be disdained and never discussed? Certainly not. There are states of mind which really need more light. Then explanations must be sought, but with all prudence. To expect them from one's own

reflections would be as illusory as to look for them in the columns of the newspapers. Indeed, our own reflections, however multiplied they may be, invariably turn in the *same circle* and bring us back to the *same point*. Therefore, consult those who are competent, or read solid books that extend or rectify your views. Bring to your inquiry a spirit of justice that does not expect the evidence in matters of this kind to be of the same special *character* as it is when other truths are in question. Distrust the influence of prevailing ideas, and do not think that your own judgement is infallible.

4. Be on your guard against returning to what has once been well cleared up. It is a peculiarity of superficial minds never to come to a settlement. Certainly, it does not depend upon ourselves to prevent the recurrence of contrary views, but it is a wise thing to *ignore* them.

5. Lofty views and a deep knowledge of religion generally put us beyond the reach of doubts. Religion comprises not only God, but also man, and it is man's work that makes the shadows. In the column of cloud that accompanied the people of God in the wilderness, there was the dark side that was turned towards the earth, and the bright side that was illumined by the celestial brightness.

III.—RECOURSE TO MERCY

i. Mercy, its plan and the part it has to play.—ii. Its manifestations : 1. Jesus and His Sacred Heart ; 2. Mary ; 3. The Saints ; 4. Pleasing God ; 5. Keeping humble.

i. How divine and also human, how admirably true is the supernatural means of having recourse to the mercy of God.

1. Whoever has deeply observed the human soul, remarks that human wretchedness everywhere appears under the forms of impotence, sickness and moral ugliness ; man's neediness is universal. Even the greatest souls, who have won the mastery over it, feel its sad incubus, and, under its violent assaults, we hear St. Paul himself cry out : " Unhappy man that I am !"

No one living has any right to think himself finally free from it. The strongest would be rash, if he were not humble.

2. Since our condition is that of human wretchedness, and since every condition has its laws, let us inquire for its code. It is summed up in two essential precepts : 1. Make use of all the powers, personal or other, that are under your control ; 2. Ask the divine Mercy for those powers in which you are wanting.

If the divine Mercy *did not exist*, it would be impossible for man, seeing what sin has

made him, to rise; and how much more impossible would it be for the soul that has been disorganized and vitiated by lukewarmness!

On the other hand, if the divine Mercy had not become *manifest and sensible* to us, it would not attain its moral purpose, which is, not to raise us, but to help us to rise. The more striking its manifestations, and the more adapted they are to our way of thinking, the more do they act upon our good-will. Courage comes from a sense of strength, even if it be a borrowed strength.

If we are to rise, our feebleness will require, externally, the help of an outstretched hand, and inwardly, an impulse of confidence.

3. But will not having recourse to the divine Mercy lower man in his dignity? No, one is not lowered by putting one's self in one's true place. The feeling that would repel the divine Mercy is not dignity, it is pride; for the faith teaches us that this aid is indispensable. It is indispensable even to the just, it is doubly indispensable to the lukewarm.

But, does not this frequent recourse to a strange power at least expose the will to the loss of its own strength from the habit of getting support, and rob it of its initiative by the sense of its own insufficiency? Quite the contrary, for moral strength and initia-

tive increase with the certainty of success. Give anyone confidence, and he will exert all his energies.

Nevertheless, it must be said that abuse always borders upon use, and even the best of things does not escape this danger. In our social communities, do we not see some of the poor losing all habits of work and allowing poverty to come upon them, because they are sure of relief? And in the spiritual order, souls are to be met with who are like them. With little elevation of disposition, and having become positively craven by habit, they give way to utter negligence and even to sins, thinking that God will put everything right. It is a mistake: divine Mercy turns aside from these mean calculations and upsets them. God could not institute His supernatural order to the detriment of His moral order. As we have said, He comes to the assistance of weakness, not to supplement it, but to make it react by adding what is wanting. Oh, let us repeat once more: how human and also divine it is to have recourse to the divine Mercy!

ii. Let us now turn towards the *manifestations* of the divine Mercy that come, like a ray of sunshine, like the face of a friend, like a hearty word, to reanimate our courage.

1. *Jesus and His Sacred Heart.*

The highest of all manifestations, the most complete, and the most touching, is Jesus, God made Man. Everything in Jesus, His life, His words, His former sufferings, His position in heaven, His Eucharist on earth, His secret action in the soul,—all this strikingly brings out His steadfast will to pardon and to help us, and to unite us to Himself. He comes to us in every way that is calculated to reach us in all our feelings.

As an infant, does He not appeal to your pity? Can you be hard on Him? Is it not the most natural thing in the world to stretch out your arms to Him?—Now look at Him as a youth, as an adult, at work with hardened hands, with humiliation all round Him, with His days filled with painful toil. What is more touching than long and devoted service? What would you think of a man who gave thirty years of his life to labour all the time for you? That is more than risking life for a single day of peril.—But Jesus also gave His life, and you know the love He showed, and the conditions of His death. But it is life for life, is it not? if you have a heart to feel.—Which of us would have thought of the Eucharist and of His hidden existence therein, so real and intimate and unifying, and always so misunderstood, and often so subject to outrage?

Here we find ourselves outdone, even in our boldest dreams. What are we to say of communions that follow upon sins, it may be upon great sins? These sins have been wiped out by Jesus, and they are no more. This is true; but might He not have stopped short at forgiveness? Ought He not to have made us wait, and to have put us to a lengthy test? But the next day after some unworthy fall, He comes into you, yes, really into you!

Oh, this divine Mercy! It overflows on all sides; it wins upon us with the memories that it so rapidly calls forth; it bathes us in the loftiest affection with its inconceivable devices, and if I look for some sensible form to sum them up and to bring them before my eyes, I perceive, O Jesus, the true emblem that Thou hast recently manifested to the world, like a fresh attempt to overcome its terrible forgetfulness; I see Thy Sacred Heart!

O Heart, so full of life, thou seemest to grieve over being hidden and beating silently in Jesus' breast; thou didst suffer, because thou wast not enough known and loved. Thou hast in a manner left this sacred retreat; thou hast appeared to the eyes of men, thou hast willed that thy sacred likeness should be scattered throughout the world in order to manifest and spread the divine Mercy!

It displays itself fully by means of the open wound which becomes a refuge. It breaks forth in the flame of love which surrounds it. It sheds the blood of a redeeming sorrow through the wounds of the thousands of thorns that enwreathe it. And this Heart, thus presented, seems to have left Thy breast, O Jesus, to belong to it no more and to force us to take it! We can kiss it and bear it with us. It is to us like an ancestral heritage which gives us rights. It is the famous relic which has protected our city. May it be to me the heart of a friend, to which I shall resort to quicken my regrets and to make my good resolutions, to which I shall come above all to learn to love!

O lukewarm soul, whoever thou mayest be and whatever be thy decadence, keep thine eyes fixed upon *"this Heart that has so loved men"!* As thou dost contemplate it, thou wilt see appear in thyself by degrees all the unworthiness of the ungrateful deeds which thou didst not understand the meaning of, and in Jesus, depths of love which thou didst not suspect. There is a special grace of divine Mercy attached to the invocation of the Sacred Heart. This grace is more powerful than human energies. By its aid, that which thou sadly feelest, that which thou canst not do, will become easy.—Multiply these invocations, for each one of them will cause to fall upon thee some fresh

ray of light, some new stimulus to repentance, another outpouring of good-will. These outpourings of the Sacred Heart are the diffusion of life, and thy invocations are like so many aspirations.

Just now pay no attention to the sacrifices and efforts that may be required of thee, but concentrate it all upon this Heart which is given thee. Look, admire, wonder, love. Yes, love sincerely, without thinking whether thou lovest generously. Love this Heart, because it is kind, because it is beautiful, because it is open to thee, because there is nothing apart from this Heart, that can re-establish thee ; love, as if thou, too, hadst the heart of a Saint !

Imagine the multitude of hearts like thine, as rebellious, as full of failings, as lukewarm, and which, at all times and in all conditions, have been overcome by its mercy. To-day, in heaven, they enjoy, they shine, and they love. What an eager throng surrounds this Heart in which they have found life ! See ! they regard thee with tender pity : thou recallest to them the great wretchedness of their own past. Hear them, they cry out to thee : Have confidence, pray, and still have confidence ! The graces of divine mercy are not yet exhausted. Jesus is a never-failing spring of them ; He is living mercy, and this life is ever seething, and ever renewed by His Heart, and this Heart un-

ceasingly conveys it to the coldest extremities of His great mystical body, so that the most lukewarm souls may enter at last into the sphere of living activity that fulfils the work of God : first of all, reformation, then sanctification, and finally, the love that unifies !

Conclusion.—Devotion to the Sacred Heart is doubtless the devotion of intimacy, but is it not also that of indigence ? And further, would you refuse to rise to the height of love ? First, aim at pity, pardon and strength ; but at the same time utter a cry of hope, and to this invocation, " Jesus, mercy !" add this expression of desire : " Sweet Heart of Jesus, be my love !" Let them come together on your lips throughout the day, at times of shirking as well as at times of good-will. The Heart of Jesus feels in them timid protests and budding impulses, and above all *ground for action.* On His kindness, which would fain pardon everything, heal everything, restore everything, the highest wisdom has imposed the necessity of waiting for our appeal. Ten, twenty, a hundred invocations, even if made with but little fervour, are so many *rights* that you give Him to hasten to your assistance.

2. *Mary.*

I raise my eyes to another manifestation of the divine Mercy. Less high, and therefore, all the nearer, she stands between Jesus and ourselves. Fear not that she will hide Him like a screen. She is pure crystal, and only receives the light to transmit it brighter still; she has nothing that does not come from Jesus; she has no desire apart from Him: she is His Mother!

O Mother, dost thou come to add something to the infinitude of thy Son? Is not thy Jesus the all-sufficient Mediator? Is He not rich enough, or would He not be kind enough? What comest thou to do, and what dost thou bring with thee?

"I am the Mother, and I come to draw near to my children. I am the Mother of Jesus, and I bring thee, unhappy child, a share of His own good things. I am thy Mother, and I bring to thy unfeeling and distrustful heart, a Heart that only knows how to love, and which cannot evoke fear."

In the natural order, God has made nothing stronger than a mother's heart. This power, without either arms or threats, is so irresistible as to bring us to our knees! What son could resist his mother's tears? His mother! She is one who will never condemn him, whatever his faults may be; one gifted with a holy blindness which will

never despise him, no matter how unworthy he may be. And he knows and realizes it; and therefore his mother will always be to him a sure refuge and a certain hope.

O God, who makest use in the order of grace of helps in the natural order, Thou hast appointed a mother as the minister of Thy mercy. Thou hadst not to create for her untiring indulgence, and affection and hope. Thou didst but allow them to follow their course in turning towards us. On the other hand, to bring into play our filial affection, Thou wert satisfied to say to us: Behold your mother!

Nor hadst Thou, O God of wisdom, any need to create in me, either, an entirely new feeling; Thou hadst implanted in my nature the instinctive trust of a child in her who has given him life, an undoubting trust which makes no distinctions, and which Thou hast made a virtue. It is often an egotistical sentiment, sometimes cruel in its unconsciousness; but a saving feeling in the end, for a day comes, when one's ingratitude stands clear and fills one with shame, and then, freed from all alloy, filial love becomes conscious of itself; it weeps and grows generous and desires to make reparation. Oh, in a true feeling, beneath the selfishness that hides it, how much vitality there is!

O God, we bless Thee for having made religion a family matter, and for having

made it abound in love! What Thou mightest have brought forth of Thy own accord and in unseen ways, Thou hast preferred to grant us by intermediaries and insensibly. Thou couldest have placed each one of us in the world by direct creation and have made him a grown man from the outset; but then what should we have missed: there would have been no family, and no mother! What should we have done with our hearts; and, without these delightful and powerful ties, what should we have made of our lives?

Thus is it in the supernatural order! Once more, O God, blessed be Thou for having made religion a family matter and for having made love to abound therein!

Let us reflect that Mary not only realizes the good qualities of our mothers, but the *ideal* of motherhood. Let us extend that which we know; what we think of as perfect, let us look upon as inferior to that which really exists; the mother's heart united to the finest intelligence, to the noblest of natures, and to the most exquisite delicacy of feeling. A heart that is warm and tender, kind to the point of weakness, a saving weakness!—A heart strong as death, and mightier than it, since it tears us away from death eternal.—A heart that is an ever open refuge, a heart that is our repose in our weariness; a heart that makes us shed sweet

tears; a heart filled with balm for every sorrow and remedies for every ill.—A heart that can overcome the most obstinate resistance, inspire the grandest thoughts, and support us in the greatest desolation.—A heart that unites man's heart with God's.—A mother's heart, which never fails to give life and to prolong it unto eternity!

This heart I would fain know in all its beauty, in all its depth, in all its supernatural privileges! Neither our earthly intelligence, nor that which shall be given us in heaven, is capable of attaining a conception of it, for this is too high for such beings as ourselves.

Though it is too high for me, I admire it all the more. I am all the prouder for having such a mother; I am still more full of confidence; for the extent of her power is as far beyond me as the extent of her perfection, and all her power is mine! Oh, what hopes are found amidst all these unforeseen beauties!

Let us form some idea of her greatness; her heart has been made to answer, so far as it is a mother's heart, to the heart of God. How high and perfect must it be!—Such is our first glance into the kind of infinitude, in which it was established.

This heart, through the many years of Bethany, of Nazareth, of apostolic journeys, of the Cenacle and of Calvary, constantly tried and ever open, always uplifted, was

enlarged to an inestimable degree. Can anyone know all that was loveable in Jesus? Can anyone estimate all the might of love there was in Mary?—Our second glance into this infinitude: how must this heart have been expanded!

And it is this heart, which was made so great, so marvellously developed, this heart that was accustomed to love beyond measure a Son whom it could not love enough, it is this heart, this same heart, that is for me a mother's heart, yes, a mother's heart, at the beck of my needs and of my childlike tyranny: it loves me in spite of my defects and coldness; coldness and failings do not hinder a mother's heart!—Our third glance into this mystery of a love as real as it is incomprehensible.

No, it will not be in vain, O my God, that Thou hast revealed my Mother to me; no, it will not be in vain, O Mother, that thou hast been willing to remain my Mother. I know not what I shall be to-morrow, I do not dare to say that I shall do great things; but I affirm with all sincerity that I find a confidence arising within me of which I was ignorant, a will for what is right that thrills my cowardice through, a real yearning never to grieve thee again!

Conclusion.—After these stirring considerations, turn to practical resolutions, which indicate the direction to take.

a. Resolve to give Mary more often the name of Mother, and to put more affection into this mode of address.—See at what time you can invoke her each day. You will do it in your temptations, and even in your times of dryness. Do not omit to do it after your sins. Dwell on her name, when it occurs in your prayers.

b. Have a few short ejaculations: "Sweet heart of Mary, be my salvation!"—"Mary, refuge of sinners, pray for us!"—"O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us!" and the like.

c. Often recite the *Memorare,* a prayer for confidence.

d. Do not allow your numerous distractions to make you give up the rosary. Your heart desires from the outset all that your lips alone, perhaps, will utter. Cast the same flowers at your Mother's feet with both hands. Like flowers without words attached, your *Ave Maria's,* even if said unconsciously, will be an offering of homage!

e. Esteem it an honour to wear Mary's livery: scapulars, medals, and so on. Be regular in the short observances imposed by such devotions.

f. Why not have a little sanctuary in your room, where Mary's picture is in honour? Visible things arouse memories. Do we not keep by us portraits of those whom we love?—Sometimes flowers, now and then a

lighted lamp, a benediction asked for on coming in or on going out ; perhaps, alas ! a few tears for a day of sins !

If you feel no liking for these things, do them nevertheless ; they have, in their way, the efficacy of sacraments, which, in order to do us good, only require that there should be no hindrance of ill-will on our part. Is not Mary, by divine appointment, a source of graces ?

3. *The Saints.*

Jesus and Mary are the two great streams of Mercy, but they do not cause to run dry the thousand streamlets of the invocation of Saints, who also bring us the sacred waters of courage and consolation.

God is so present and active in His creatures, that if He were to manifest Himself visibly, we should be bewildered, and the world would truly seem to us like a sacred edifice.

If He hides within the grain of sand, and displays Himself, near by, in the vast oceans, which are material things, He lives far more in His Saints, who belong to the spiritual order. True it is, that His presence in them cannot be more real, but it is more abundant, like light which is reflected from the innumerable facets of a globe of crystal. God is therefore not blotted out or lessened or divided, when one of the faithful invokes

Him by Jesus, by Mary, by the great St. Joseph, or by any other of His friends. His grace is the same, and the part played by His activity is equally great. Only the appearances differ ; but He clothes His grace in these appearances to make it more sensible to us, and more adapted to our conceptions. A few episodes from the life of a Saint, a few words spoken from the heart, an instance of wonderful protection in some case of extremity, and, above all, miracles, these He uses to revive drooping confidence and hesitating courage. Hands are outstretched towards such manifestations of Hope, more earnest prayers ascend towards such striking evidences of power ; and God's end is attained, He has called forth an outburst of energy, while, at the same time, procuring for His servant in heaven an additional glory from earth.

Hence, there is no reason to be afraid of the new devotions introduced by the Church, whether by the application of some affecting title or name to Jesus or Mary, or by authorizing, through her benediction, some fresh sanctuary, where mercy seems to have cut out a more direct path, or by favouring some popular devotion in honour of a Saint.

Do not let us lose sight of the fact that it is a principle of the supernatural life to be connected with the natural life, the resources of the latter being but the handmaids of the

former. Far from excluding natural resources, it makes use of them. It retains an exclusive right of controlling them, and its guarantee is to be found in the vigilant authority of the Church.

Hence, do not fear that you will displease Jesus and hurt the feelings of His holy Mother in putting them a little aside to allow yourself to attend or give your affection to some Saint towards whom you feel drawn. You understand him better, and he seems to you more easy of access. His closeness reassures you. Perhaps the very weaknesses of his life of trial encourage your confidence.

Follow, then, your attraction: all the various forms of homage converge, without any exception, towards the same centre, towards the final object, towards the Supreme Author of all grace.

4. *Pleasing God.*

In flying to mercy, our indigence fulfils its natural function; in trying to make some offering that is pleasing to God, it goes beyond it in an affecting way. A poor man who gives, a cold heart which shows delicate attentions, this is indeed quite a new order of things! There is a change made on both sides: God becomes a debtor and has a fresh reason for increasing His kindness, and the soul, feeling she has a sort of claim

upon Him, finds an increase of courage, and perhaps begins to be conscious of a dignity she has long forgotten.

If great acts and sacrifices, if generous victories are not yet included in your means, do not be disconcerted. Little gifts may suffice. The petty offering is at least a mark of attention. Its whole value consists in the initiative that tries to find it, and in the affection that it carries with it.

A common flower gathered especially for you, a word checked so as not to grieve you, a simple look will touch you ; these things reveal what is in the heart as much as an act of importance. This heart, which is so poor, so sick, and perhaps so hostile, nevertheless, at bottom, quite in its depths, still retains some lingering remains of affection !—It acts, and therefore, it is alive ! It has but little life, it is true, but it becomes revived by use.

If it exerts itself often thus, will it not set up a kind of habit, merely external perhaps, but yet one that brings it closer ? Such are the little acts of kindly politeness between the members of a divided family, the little attentions shown to a child or a sick person. Are not these things like the weak voice of one who is still feeble ?

Be of good courage, then ! Poor soul, who art cold and sluggish, here is a means that is quite within thy reach. It will cost

thee only a little effort ; it will involve thee in no struggle with thyself ; it does not even require a formal determination to return to well-doing. If thou art cold, ill-disposed; and in the wrong, give at least an act, a remembrance, or a word. Sow in the broad field of Mercy. A germ needs so little life for Omnipotence to make it bud and flower !

1. Would you have a few practical ideas ? Well, in the first place, are there not the *poor ?* God loves them so, and He is so well inclined towards those who help them ! Every day try to find some unfortunate one, to whom you may offer an alms. If it be difficult for you to undertake to do this daily, try a little ingenuity ; in your room let there be a purse for the poor. This purse will be their hand which takes what you give. Do not be satisfied with filling it rarely at long intervals. Go once or twice a day to contribute your mite : these are attentions that God especially esteems ; these are the frequent stimulus which the sluggishness of your heart requires. Do not yield to the desire of getting rid of the trouble once for all by giving a quantity all at once, for you would not thus attain the object desired.

It would, indeed, be still more meritorious, if you were to impose on yourself certain self-denials in order to find the alms ; but do not tax your new generosity too far, and do

not undertake to do anything you cannot keep up without getting tired of it.

2. Give the suffering souls of Purgatory the alms of some easily gained indulgence. There are so many short prayers enriched with them. Thus will you give the heavenly Father the right He so much desires to open His arms the sooner to a child whom His justice still obliges Him to keep far from Him.

3. In our days, we have not only poor who want bread, but, along with them, religious works which are lacking in resources: the Propagation of the Faith, St. Peter's Pence, and a host of other works that are beloved of God. In many churches, does not Our Lord Himself want almost everything? Is there not something especially touching in the heart which is unfaithful to Jesus nevertheless seeking to supply linen for His altar, an ornament for His tabernacle, or a lamp, the flame of which will be a prayer on its behalf?

4. Who can tell—for you are no doubt supposed to be kindly—who can tell if people will not come to you for some pious advice, or to confide to you some delicate matter? Who can tell whether you may not meet with some ignorant person to instruct, some sinner to convert, some sick person to prepare for death? Give, give! Console, fortify, save, edify! Do not fear that in acting thus you will appear to be inconsistent; think

only that you are far more so in remaining unfaithful yourself.

5. In our daily life, we have a mine of excellent little exercises.—Acts of patience: you are disturbed, you have to wait, you meet with contradiction. Well, accept with a good grace for God's sake the first occasion that offers itself.—Acts of kindness: to do a little service; say a kindly word; put a little pleasantness into an ordinary greeting.—Is there some member of your family who has annoyed you? Determine to speak to him amiably, and to put yourself out for his sake.—If there is someone you are in the habit of treating unceremoniously, make up your mind to show him more respect.

6. The *invocation* of the Sacred Heart and of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a special means which we have treated elsewhere, but it may easily be joined with the one we are considering. Is it not well-pleasing to God to offer Him, morning and evening, one or two of these short ejaculations? This is an offering, the material of which is never lacking, and the occasions for which are constantly with us.

Other practices: Enter a church for a moment,—salute it in passing, or even from your room by turning your head in that direction,—cast a glance at the Crucifix,—kneel down before some devotional picture,—kiss the ground, particularly after sinning.

7. Do you feel that you have the good-will to make some little sacrifices, at any rate, occasionally? Then, deny yourself the asking of some question out of curiosity, some pages of interesting reading, some delicacies, or even a mere mouthful of bread! Here the desire of pleasing God is more intense and more meritorious; it also becomes more life-giving.

An Essential Recommendation.—In each of these acts, however small and repeated they may be, never omit to say explicitly: "I am indeed wretched; still, O my God, I do it to give Thee pleasure!" Persons who have adopted this practice without expecting anything, and even quite resolved not to change, have been observed to be completely transformed by it. It is not in vain that we evoke the love of an Almighty Father!

5. *Keeping Humble.*

Poor soul, thou art so held fast in the grip of evil that thou canst not set thyself free from its slavery; thou hardly wishest to do so, for thou encouragest the evil from within and despairest both of God and of thyself. Of thee, alas! I hardly know what to say; but what about God? Listen! There were formerly places of refuge, where justice was willing to halt in impotence. Verily, mercy is an immense place of refuge

open on all sides, but at least it is necessary to run towards it, to make an effort, to pray with perseverance, and thou feelest that thou lackest the required strength :—well, there is a refuge that is more accessible, and closer still ; it is humility.

Nothing is better suited to thy state, since it is very low ; nothing lies more within the range of thy feelings, since thou art disgusted with thyself. Consider and acknowledge thy wretchedness ; be sorry for the good God who has to put up with thee ; never have the audacity to despise anyone. When this refuge has once been entered, do not leave it.

Thou art now in thy true place ; this is, indeed, quite right ;—thou takest up the fitting attitude : this is just.—Thy evil is still evil, but it no longer wears the look of a revolt ; it grieves God, but it does not anger Him ; thou keepest the evil, alas ! but thou bewailest it ! These dispositions are such as bring down grace with all its indulgence and help ! It seems as if humility were enough for everything, as if it filled up all that was wanting. The feelings which it presupposes, the dispositions which it creates, and the pity that it stirs in God's heart, prepare all the elements of forgiveness. If thy groaning wretchedness conceives the will to return and seeks strength in prayer, it is at once raised up. If sometimes it

requires a miracle to get free, nothing is more likely to produce one than this disposition.

And, behold, thanks to all these little devices, thy spiritual life comes to be exercised, revived and trained; for, finally, all these little things are, indeed, piety, goodness, and love; so true is it that all motion towards God is inevitably a movement in the direction of the good.

IV.—THE USE OF THESE VARIOUS MEANS

After you have attentively considered these various means of reformation, *fix upon one or two of them*, according to the fundamental principle of our method. Do not be satisfied with a good general disposition, the gradual outcome of the foregoing reflections. It is too like a scattered light. Unite the rays, and make them converge upon a well-selected point.

1. *The Key of the Position.*—In every life, as in a battle, there is almost always one point which is the key of the position.

1. If your languor comes from a *lack of nourishment*, be courageous enough to prescribe the necessary food, in spite of the weariness such constraint may cause. 2. If it depends upon some *failing*, attack it with vigour and without remission. 3. Are you lacking in the courage or the clearness of

view required? You have at any rate the sense of your wretchedness; then, it is a case for *having recourse to divine mercy!*

ii. *The Point of Attack.*—As soon as you have settled on the point of attack, start the fight itself.

1. To nourish my spiritual life, I will take the following subjects in succession. *First subject:*—I will fulfil all Christian practices faithfully,—the offering of my heart to God,—prayers, morning and evening,—Grace at meals,—examination of conscience,—Sunday Mass,—confession and communion.—*Second subject:*—I will fulfil them all with the *greatest care*, putting myself in the presence of God before beginning, keeping a humble and earnest attitude, concentrating my attention on what I recite or read, not allowing myself to curtail anything, nor to go too rapidly through any of my prayers.

2. *Failings* are fought against by binding one's self to *avoid* the occasions that give rise to them, or by forcing one's self to *resist* them, or by inflicting upon one's self a *penalty* for every slip.

3. One of the easiest ways of keeping up the practice of *having recourse to the divine mercy* is to fix upon a certain number of invocations to be made every morning and evening. Facility comes with habit, and the acts one did first of all by constraint become pleasant; the soul grows supple and tender.—

Do not be too exacting at the outset: to have recourse twice to God, morning and evening, is but little, yet it is enough.—Add to this an immediate recurrence to the divine mercy on the occurrence of any sin, or of any occasion of sin.

The choice of a means should be made regularly on the day of one's confession.

iii. *The Method.*—1. Every morning, while you are dressing, fasten your mind on the point you propose to yourself and on the means selected; do this with clearness and resolution. 2. During the day exercise a certain amount of watchfulness on this point. 3. At midday, if possbile, try to take yourself seriously in hand; and in the evening, during your self-examination, pass the day in review *with regard to this question.*

The result of this *special* struggle will be the first *subject* of your next confession. This gives unity and completeness to our method, which is simple in itself, though it requires some time to explain.

NOTE.—Numerous details are given in our little pamphlet: *Pratique de l'Examen particulier.*

Signs of Progress

Doubtless you will like to know whether you are getting rid of extreme lukewarmness. Nothing can be easier. Here are the signs, which are easily ascertained.

I

Avoiding sins which one would have formerly fallen into, or feeling keener regret after committing them.

II

Feeling, at times at any rate, a desire to be better.

III

Thoughts of the faith recurring more frequently to the mind, and God seeming to be less distant.

IV

Taking some of the means suggested ; for instance, resuming exercises of devotion that have been long omitted ; giving them up less frequently, and resuming them more readily.

V

Feeling a greater confidence in the Blessed Virgin Mary or in the Sacred Heart.

Note.—Any one of these signs, even if taken alone, shows an increase of vitality.

SECOND STATE

LESSER LUKEWARMNESS

I

Characteristics and Causes of Lesser Lukewarmness

I.—CHARACTERISTICS

i. Descriptive characteristics.—ii. Theological characteristics.

1

Here we have still to do with lukewarmness, but in a lesser degree. It comprises three classes of persons, coming from very different sources. Some come from below and are on their way to a cure, others are on the way down, alas! from a higher state, a life of great fervour, and run great risks of not stoppng short at this stage of decadence. Lastly, there are a great many who have good natures and lead peaceable lives, but who have never been either better or worse.

Between these classes there may be all the varieties that result from temperament, position, and a more or less religious or haphazard bringing-up, but two essential charac-

teristics they have in common : a life without any real piety, and also without restraint.

1. Their devotional exercises are such as do not cost them anything : they recite the Rosary and go to Mass during the week, but do not bind themselves to any spiritual reading, or to an examination of conscience.

From time to time they propose to give more frequent thoughts to God, and to make a few mortifications ; but this effort is not lasting, and generally remains no more than a mere wish.

Some of them go pretty often to confession and communion, and there it is that we find more particularly an unfortunate cause of their lukewarmness : in their abuse of these incomparable means.

For confession they make a superficial and purely formal examination of conscience : as soon as they have discovered a respectable number of accusations to make, often mere puerilities, that is enough for them : their preparation is over.—From what they tell him the confessor can neither judge of their spiritual state nor give useful advice.—After confession, they make a cursory thanksgiving, and they say their penance without any true spirit of faith.—They carry away no deep impressions : there is no renewal of life.

What can be said of the way they make their communions ?—There is little or no

preparation on the preceding days, and their life is as lacking in fervour as usual.—Their communion is made without love, perhaps without any real attention; there is no intimacy with Our Lord, no earnestly felt petition. The Sacrament is received, and some of its graces; but *Jesus Himself is not welcomed.* He passes as a stranger might pass through an empty house.

2. Their life is lacking in restraint.—They are disdainful or amiable by turns, and passionate or patient, exuberant or reserved, careless or prudent, according to their *nature,* their *temperament,* or their *interest.*

They disclose other people's shortcomings, and let themselves speak evil of their neighbours, on the ground that what they say is true. They murmur against those whose orders they have to receive, and discuss their conduct, and tell others of their dissatisfaction.

They talk of themselves on all occasions, often to extol themselves, but oftener perhaps from being unconsciously pleased to put themselves forward.

Anyone need not have all these faults at once in order to lose the ability to direct his life. Numerous sins, barren agitation, impotence in self-reformation, and an absence of a supernatural spirit, such is the sad debit balance of this kind of lukewarmness at the beginning of the second state.

II

From these general observations let us now distinguish the special characteristics of this state.

1. *With Regard to Mortal Sin.*—Such a person is freed, though imperfectly, from affection for mortal sin. He does not say now : " I wish such and such a thing were not a sin." He does not turn so often in the direction of what he agrees to abandon ; but he has no great dislike for such things. There is no sense of horror, such as makes any consent almost an impossibility.

2. *With Regard to Venial Sin.*—He is resolved to avoid this in a general way, but not altogether. Hence his submission to God is not complete : he makes some reservations. The avoidance of sin is not *clear and frank :* it makes distinctions. Moreover, his determination is not very *firm*, and it often gives way.

3. *With Regard to Spiritual Activity.*—He makes some efforts, and uses some means, but feebly and intermittently. He has got on to some extent, and feels that he has life and will-power ; but he has as yet no real nor, above all, established activity. His effort easily gives way before difficulties, or even comes to a standstill from slackness. Hence, his turning back occurs more or less frequently, and his periods of relapse are more or less prolonged. He does not start afresh ordin-

arily, unless there is some *exterior* stimulus, and principally that of confession.

Those who are reduced to such a state of lukewarmness are numerous. Many never get beyond it, or, at any rate, they never rise above it. We may, however, say with confidence that anyone who has the courage to follow the direction given in this book will gradually free himself from affection for mortal sin, and will hardly ever commit venial sins deliberately and intentionally. At the same time, his improvement will be manifested by the usual signs of the beginnings of fervour : *good-will, watchfulness* over self, and *prayer*.

II.—CAUSES

In the main, all the causes of this lukewarmness may be reduced to two, which were specified in the general description of lukewarmness : insufficiency of spiritual nourishment—disorders of the activities and life. Nevertheless, since they are less clearly divided, and almost always confused together, we think it better to present them in a broader way ; and, on the other hand, in order that the mind, which is so ready to set a criticism on one side when all its characteristics do not apply to it, may not find this pretext in tables which are too general, we shall first of all deal with the causes that are peculiar to

youth, and then with those that are found in those of riper age. (We followed this procedure in the list of questions, pp. 10 *ff.*)

i. *Causes peculiar to Youth.*

1. *Lightness and Frivolity.*—This is nothing in appearance, little, considered as sin ; but it is very great indeed in its results. Piety demands seriousness, attention, time, everything that is dissipated by lightness.

Divine *truths* lie deep in shadow ; they require long consideration, if they are to be discerned emerging out of it, as things emerge at break of day. As for pious *impressions*, these are only stamped upon us by prolonged action.

To allow one's faculties to be dissipated is to scatter one's powers and activities and time hither and thither, without any aim or result. Thus one abdicates the noble privilege of directing one's life ; one allows one's self to be dominated by poor habits ; one impoverishes one's nature, and one ends by becoming incapable of these two necessary acts : attention and effort.

This defect is incompatible with fervour ; if it does not produce dislike, it sets up indifference.

And to think that such and such a person, who was in the main a fine and generous individual, had he only overcome his frivolity,

might have discovered an unknown world :—God and heaven, Jesus and His intimacy, Mary and her affection ;—in order to live, to rise, and to blossom forth in nobler feelings ; in order to secure, for perhaps a long life, peace, honour, and fruitfulness : in order to be spared tardy and impotent regrets, for one cannot recover the freshness of one's early impressions, the flexibility of one's first habits, and the dash of one's original enthusiasm.

Love your hours of silence, and let the silence penetrate within you. Try to meditate. Increase the number of times you turn to God. Do not let yourself go too much, if you happen to fall in with anyone, and try to get possession of yourself again. Pay no attention to any change that may take place in your feelings ; *you* are to be seen only in your deliberate will. Be patient with yourself : before a state is established, oscillations must be expected. Do not love your defects, but learn to bear with them, even when you are fighting against them.

2. *An Excessive Desire to Succeed.*—This desire may be the result of a very ardent disposition, or of a feeling of pride ; but when it is excessive, it has effects that are, in either case, opposed to fervour : it *absorbs* all other desires, and especially those of piety, which are exotic plants that are very easily killed,—it *exhausts* one's boldness by monopolizing it—it *awakens* envy and suspicions of injustice,

exaggerates one's pretensions, and inspires one with a *contempt for others*.

Under such influences, one's nature gets an indescribable harshness, which has the effect of hardening the heart. Do not speak to such a person of the joys of prayer and of communion. What do these joys count for? Do not talk to him of the lesser virtues of gentleness, patience, and kindliness: will these help him to a single step up the ladder? Above all, do not speak to him of the humility which moderates such greed of success, and accepts a check with peaceable resignation, and, in a spirit of faith, goes even so far as to thank God for it: *Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me*. No, no, all that will only seem strange to him!

Certainly, emulation is a legitimate stimulus; its excess alone is a fault; a little salt in our food not only makes the things we eat better, but also more easily assimilated. A Christian, however, should find in the desire of pleasing God, and in the feeling of duty, *a principle of zeal*, which, without excluding the human motive of success, would dominate it by all its nobility.

3. *Reveries.*—i. In youth these are the most formidable enemies of piety: formidable, because they make spontaneous incursions, forcing their way, and upsetting the conscience; formidable, because they drag a thousand disorders in their train. They are

welcomed as a ray of glorious sunshine : the future is filled with brightness and movement and life ; there is spring on all sides, brilliant sunshine, sweet-smelling flowers, and intoxicating feelings. The sorrows of the present are put to flight ; the perils of the future fade away in the hazy distance. A kindly fairy has transformed everything with a stroke of her wand ! Alas ! this fairy is called " imagination," and her dominion does not extend beyond the borders of dreamland. As soon as one awakes, everything is gone : the awakening is real life ; and how sad and dark and commonplace this life usually is ! What will become of you later on ? Well, you have it under your eyes ; look at your parents ! They were just what you are ! It is a vain thing for you to try to escape from the prospect of the hard reality by surrounding yourself with obstinate illusions ; it is in vain that you shelter your hopes in the refuge of a dubious *perhaps :* your lot will be like that of those who have gone before you ; time, with its patient but pitiless hand, takes upon itself to pluck these dream-flowers one by one, all withered.

ii. Reveries compromise the future, and that is indeed much ; but they do still more, they overbear the present ; the evil which they do is incalculable.

Do you not see how they *distort* your ideas ? how they make you lose the true

sense of life? Do you not feel that they create in you a *distaste* for everything you ought to like or love: God, what is good and lovely, and even the members of your own family? Do you not experience, perhaps with alarm, the way in which they *debilitate* your will? and do you not seem to proceed, in spite of yourself, under their sway? What is still worse, you become *selfish*. It is useless to look at the poetical side of reveries; they are, after all, a kind of self-seeking, and that sometimes of a discreditable sort. You do not dream of the good of mankind, do you? No, it is your own that you are thinking of.

And where is it that you expect to find this happiness? Perhaps in tainted surroundings, and near abysses that make your fancy reel. You familiarize yourself with evil, which you clothe with the tints and attractions of your imagination. A pretty disposition is this indeed: how false and peevish and enfeebled! how selfish and radically impaired, and, perhaps, unconsciously perverse! Every kind of fall, even if it has not yet occurred, thus at least becomes possible, and even probable.

iii. And what becomes of piety, with its beneficent demands and its peaceful joys? An exile, or rather a victim! What can such a soul learn of the mind of an invisible God from prayer made in forms that seem to grow monotonous, from reading that treats

of abstract truths, from an examination of conscience carelessly made? How Jesus is to be compassionated for having to give Himself to such a soul in Holy Communion and to keep for her the place that He cannot refuse, either in His Heart or in heaven, to one in a state of grace!

You who feel the attraction of this siren of day-dreams, but are not yet taken in her toils by long habit; stay, think, pray, and show your energy. Let there be no half-measures, no concessions: cut all the bad out of the fruit; keep away from all doubtful company. Above all, take care about your reading; there are perfectly sound novels, which, from the point of view that we are now considering, are *even more dangerous* than those which are bad; and yet there are also quite innocent natures, which are more subject to reveries than some others which are already tainted with what is evil.

Avoid everything that enervates, such as some kinds of music, sentimental novels, and scents.—Be always doing something,—physical exercise, especially if it be hard, absorbs any excess of mental activity.

Above all, have recourse to God, *in spite of yourself;* as yet, do not ask Him for joys to replace those of your imagination; only ask Him for good-will, for means to try, and for perseverance: divine joys will doubtless be granted some day in abundance.

This evil disappears only by slow degrees; therefore do not be surprised if you *meet again and again* with the same inclinations and desires, and with the same delights in your reveries. Sometimes the evil revives, it has times of *recrudescence*, and its crises; then hold fast, and if you give way for a short time, pick up again without delay—the crises will become wider apart; they will grow less violent, and finally, like some thunderstorm that goes away, they will be lost altogether in the distance.

4. *The Influence of Unwholesome Surroundings.*—The plant draws from the earth in which its roots are hidden, and from the air in which its stem swings to and fro, the elements of which it is formed; it has only its vital principle which is its own. Thus is it with the soul of man. The thoughts that guide it, the feelings that animate it, come from the surroundings in which it lives: hence the differences of civilization, and the vast variety of our family and social organizations. One assimilates what one hears and sees: words and examples are the earth and the air, from which one draws one's moral life. There is, indeed, at the bottom of everyone an individual vital principle that offers more or less resistance to these influences; but this element is too weak for its action to extend very far. There is, fortunately, another higher and more powerful

principle: the divine action; and thus one sees flowers of goodness bloom on ungrateful ground, and whiteness blow in the midst of miry swamps. It is grace that works these wonders. Under its inspiration, a fine soul will look above surrounding examples, and feed upon pure truth. But these are exceptions, and we have to consider what is, unhappily, the general rule.

If the surroundings in which you are placed are unfortunately poor in ideas and not very Christian, be faithful to your first grace, which will be that you have noticed it; the next will be the will to get away from such influences. Confession affords you a practical means of doing so, if you make it your real guide. You will then look for a confessor who will devote himself to the work; you will tell him not only your sins, but your tastes and your resolutions, your disappointments and your defects: confession gives light and encouragement, reanimates and uplifts; it provides for everything. He who knows how to find in it the divine friendship is like the plant which, in spite of the poorness of the soil and the miasma of the surrounding air, inhales the breath of life from the sun's bright beams.

He will prudently isolate himself, without any contempt for those about him, offering each one kindliness with self-respect and self-restraint, but endeavouring to please. The

sight of what is wrong will only evoke his generosity : and how thankful will he be to God, and how desirous of winning souls to Him ! To please God by loving Him for the sake of others is what he yearns to do.

In ordinary surroundings, even if fervent, sometimes will be found those who are more or less corrupt. A kind of instinct makes them recognize one another and draw together. These little coteries are abominable : they set up a noxious fermentation which has a disorganizing effect on what is vital. Woe to the person who is still sound, if he is drawn into such a circle ! First he is attracted by some leaning of his own, and then he stays on from *amour-propre*, and finally remains with some remorse. Seeming to be conversant with what he is ignorant of, he gets to know a good deal. The fatal surroundings envelop his higher thoughts, his generous yearnings, and his upright principles : he stifles them, slowly crushes them, and destroys them in bitter disenchantment. God withdraws into His heaven, far, far off ! Jesus is no longer a friend to whom one talks ! Piety has lost its charm ! Is there any need to suggest the fatal and ever-to-be-regretted consequence—the loss of innocence ?

Do your best to shun the little group where people talk in a low voice with uneasy looks ; keep nothing back from your confessor, and

do not wait to make disclosures until what is wrong has got the better of you and keeps your lips sealed.

ii. *Causes peculiar to those of Riper Age.*

1. *Naturalism.*—This state is frequently met with in those who have lived amidst surroundings of religious indifference. The great truths of the faith have never shed their light upon their infancy ; holy practices have never stamped any deep imprint on their youth ; Christian goodness has shown them none of its charms, and the air they have breathed has never brought with it any waft from heaven. For them the supernatural has been no more than a vague formula. Baptism and the sacraments have given them life ; but they have never felt it sensibly, and its ideal is unknown to them.

Others, alas ! amidst the heavenly brightness have never been able to get any clear vision, and though their soul no doubt is honest enough, it is merely pagan : the words and the example of Jesus leave no impress on their thoughts and feelings ; His sacred person, which is such a living thing to others, is to them a sort of abstraction ; Jesus is not a *person*, but an article of faith, an historic memory, with some vague notion of survival. They know all that is known by the devout ; but they are just as if they knew it not. When

they speak of such things, they talk like deaf people who cannot hear what they are saying!

Is this due to a lack of natural elevation, or is it the result of lowering circumstances? May it not be a punishment for sins committed long ago or for inveterate omissions? Certainly, it is not God who would spontaneously deny a love which He is only too eager to exhibit. They have no sense of things supernatural, just as some people are without any sense of music or of poetry. Let it be said, nevertheless, that no one is so wanting in this sense that he cannot *develop* it by exercise and *establish* it by practice. Finally, let us add that aids, and, if need be, supplementary substitutes may be found in other faculties, and, above all, in grace.

That which characterizes these persons is an *easy* lack of self-restraint so far as their likings are concerned. As men's tastes vary greatly, and as the circumstances that enable one to satisfy them are equally diversified, it is impossible to enumerate the things that attract them; all that can be said is, that they seek these without remorse, provided that they are not *absolutely wrong*.

If these persons are very good-natured, they will give up their likings in favour of others; but they never think of giving them up for a religious duty, nor for the purpose of their own amendment, and still less for the sake of pleasing God. These people do

not go very far in doing wrong ; but, being without any spirit of faith, they easily commit venial sins, make but few efforts, and remain lukewarm.

2. *Preoccupation.*—These persons might understand the things of religion, and would be capable of great sacrifices : the misfortune is that they do not give themselves time to think about them. They are generally active and busy ; they never stop with themselves, and still less with God.

They are preoccupied : some by the care of their own interests, others by hosts of petty and vain details ; some by the desire to have a finger in every pie, even if it be from excess of good-nature ; others by the innumerable needs which they manufacture.

However this may be, they are all in the same position with regard to the things of God : they have no time, and also no taste for them ; their mind and heart are both utterly dry when they pray. The notions of piety, perfection, and of the love of God, jar in a sphere so full of agitation.

If, however, it be otherwise, and if Christian ideas still sometimes reach them, it is only to create in them a few vain regrets and passing aspirations.

3. *Disquietude.*—There are people who are perpetually upset. Their circumstances may change, but it is in vain ; they never bring them peace.

Several defects are characteristic of this state.

First, they are *over-sensitive*. Who, indeed, will own that he is irritable? "Irritable! Indeed, I should think so, and certainly I have good reason to be. Anybody in my place would feel as I do, and many would be much more irritated! But this sort of thing only happens to myself!" Note the smile with which your excuse is received; perhaps it may undeceive you! What an unfortunate disposition it is to see what offends you so conspicuously that you can see nothing else!

Then, they show an ill-regulated *anxiety* in all circumstances: they are full of worry, always apprehensive of difficulties or misfortunes, and exaggerating them when they occur.—Or else they are always panting for success.—Or else they are too wrapped up in material interests, and given over to the pursuit of innumerable expedients.

Here we will merely make mention of excessive affections and aversions of which we have already spoken (pp. 124, *ff.*). There is no need to say that these are the two most dangerous factors in stirring up this kind of agitation. Whatever the defect may be which gives rise to this state, what annoyances and upsets follow from it!

Lastly, such a person thinks only of himself. What place can he give to God and to

His action? What care can he give to his spiritual life?

4. *Despondency.*—There are those whom the *troubles of life* have robbed of all their *energy:* they no longer care about anything; they cannot make an effort; even the desire to do so seems to have gone from them. There are others whose *temperament* always makes them look on the dark side of things, and there are some whose *ailing condition* predisposes them to depression.

Depression, whatever its cause may be, weakens the will and paralyzes one's activities. It makes people dead to the sense of venial sin and personal affection, and to the love of God. It closes the heart, hinders consolation, and puts a stop to prayer.

Depression produces effects like damp cold: it chokes out life.

5. *Bitterness.*—When an imperfect character is overtaken by misfortune, he becomes embittered and is not crushed; this depends upon the type of his disposition.

Here, for instance, is an energetic person in the full possession of his powers, who feels himself straitened in some narrow position, either by reverses of fortune or by a lingering illness. He abuses his lot, his circumstances, other people, and, often, even Providence itself.

Suffering, which gives the perfect a kind of finish, stirs up demoralizing rebellion in one who is ardent but imperfect. All bitterness

is contrary to the divine gentleness of piety. Bitterness, if it be only on the edges of the vessel, spoils everything that is poured into it. What will it do if it pervades all the contents?

Such a person exaggerates trouble, and attacks those through whom it comes. If it were God, he says, I would submit, but it is all this man's fault! If it were just, I would not complain, but to be so misunderstood, so deceived, this is really too much!

Rebellion in such a case does not go so far as grave sin. The individual submits, or rather suffers; yet with how poor a grace, and with what constant murmurs!

6. *Sins that produce Lukewarmness by hindering Grace.*—The spiritual states that we have been considering are *direct* causes of lukewarmness; they *slacken* the *energy* and *absorb the activities* of the soul.

The following sins do not act thus: they induce lukewarmness mainly by *hindering grace.* There are two which are especially hateful to Our Lord and opposed to His spirit: *pride,* which goes as far as contempt, and *lack of charity* for our neighbour.

If you discover either of these faults in yourself, attack it resolutely, and before all others.

NOTE.—It would take too much time to show in this place how they must be fought, for these two defects occur in a multiplicity of forms.—With regard to pride, one may use with advantage our book: *Formation à l'humilité.*

II

The Treatment of Lesser Lukewarmness

This state of lesser lukewarmness clearly affords resemblances to the state of extreme lukewarmness, since they both belong to the same class of malady ; yet they have a very decided difference : the soul is less exposed to danger, better provided against it, and more capable of serious efforts. Here we have no perilous life and death struggle ; it is a fight between sickness and health.

The fundamental causes of this state are the same as those of the first. In either of them we have to do with the want of spiritual nourishment and with the dominant influence of unfortunate tendencies. However, the want of nourishment is less far-reaching, and the influence of unfortunate tendencies has less urgency. And often, even these general causes only persist owing to an imperfect organization of one's way of living.

The tendency is to pass from lukewarmness to fervour. There is a desire for the good, and an attempt to do it. If there are occasional lapses, there are rapid recoveries. Hence, more serious exercises will be undertaken, and they become better adapted to convey spiritual life.

The treatment, in order to be suitable, must pursue two objects: to *stimulate* the spiritual life, and to *consolidate* it.

1. The means of *stimulation* comprise exercises of piety, union with God during the day, and a good use of the sacraments.

2. The means of *consolidation* may be summed up in the essential and little understood work of the *organization* of one's life. An intelligent regulation will not only fix the hours; it lays down *rules* of conduct for the reformation, the defence, and the progress of the soul.

NOTE.—This simple explanation brings us to this general comparison: the treatment of extreme lukewarmness was characterized by this prescription: *the reconstitution of the simple Christian life*; the treatment of the state of lesser lukewarmness is characterized by this other prescription: *initiation into the life of piety.*

I.—Stimulating the Spiritual Life

1. Exercises of Piety.

We shall not again go through those exercises which are common to all Christians, for we have already explained their binding character and the method of using them. The less lukewarm will fulfil these *essential duties* with more profit, but they will not stop there: they will add thereto some exercises of *counsel.*

Here we shall put forward the most important—not that they may all be made use of, but that they may be known, and that they may be regarded with affection. The rules for making a judicious selection will come in their proper place.

i. *Church Devotions.*—To be regular in attending church on Sunday, and especially the parochial sermon,—to follow the seasons of Advent and Lent, and of the month of Mary,—the retreats,—to take part in processions at special feasts, and especially at the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament: all this nourishes piety without, indeed, making a demand for any strain on the mind. And how could one fail to find an abundance of nourishment in practices which are like a family table laid by the Church for all her children? We must bring to them a gentle

and humble spirit, which does not expect too much. If we look for God in them, we shall find Him in all that is set before us, even in the poorest, and in all the words we hear, even in the least appreciated.

Attendance at the house of God introduces us to its occupant in a kind of filial familiarity. The spirit of faith is imbibed through all that one sees and hears, by the silence and even by the dimness of the holy place. The air we breathe seems to come from heaven. Perhaps we feel no strong emotion. One scarcely perceives the happy influence that overshadows one. Yet it is so deep, that, after a long succession of years, such and such a memory, awakening suddenly, returns to you like a perfume or a breath of incense. The past arises as if it were yesterday. You remember the place, those who were around you, the seat you occupied, and the clothes you then wore. Such and such a hymn haunts you with its memories. The lights again surround you with their brightness, the flowers with their fragrance, and the pious feelings with all their charm. It was, indeed, a deeply rooted impression to throw such brightness across the infinite tangle of human anxieties that have been heaped up in the course of the years. It may be a first communion, the end of a retreat, or the mere succession of Sundays and feast-days, bringing back the same cere-

monies, the same chants, and the same peaceful joys.

ii. *Holy Mass.*—1. We are now dealing with the hearing of Mass during the week, and still better, every day. "The Most Holy Sacrifice of the altar," says St. Francis of Sales, "is among the exercises of religion what the sun is among the stars. . . . It is the centre of all other mysteries and laws."

It is Jesus reappearing in the assembly of the faithful, as He did formerly amongst the Apostles, when the doors were shut; Jesus renewing, in a manner as real as it is mysterious, the sacrifice of Calvary with all the outpouring of His grace; the heavenly Jesus coming down to earth to live here for awhile, so as to be the direct confidant of our needs and sorrows and good desires; Jesus putting Himself close to us and along with us to pray to His Father, to express our admiration and gratitude and regrets to Him! Oh, what an immense hope is here opened for our despondency! Oh, what sweet violence is done to our indifference! I can unfold my lukewarmness and desires, and even my shame, to God, and Jesus will reiterate all my words! I may try to affirm a few of my feelings of love, and Jesus will formulate them in my heart. Both our voices will join together in the same prayer. Both our hearts will beat with the same feeling. God will condescend to see but a single worshipper who

bends in adoration, a single victim who makes expiation, a single thankfulness that finds expression, and one need that manifests its wants.

2. Do not say that this is all very fine, and that these wonderful views are like the fancy pictures with which we play upon the simplicity of children. At the root of things, almost everywhere is hidden something of the infinite ; it is hidden, indeed, and we see it not : but, fortunately, it is still there. Sure faith affirms it, a living faith gives us a glimpse of it. Can you not understand the Saint who is weeping at the foot of the altar, this St. Francis of Assisi, who dares not ascend the steps, this devout soul who comes here daily for his daily bread ?

The important thing is to put one's self in the proper conditions to *understand*. Then the spirit of faith gives us eyes to see and a heart to feel. These conditions are *recollection* and *reflection*. A mind which is dissipated will come away from Mass rather more blind and cold, and rather more persuaded that there is nothing to be seen or felt there !

3. There have been many methods put forward for hearing Mass holily. St. Francis of Sales gives two in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*. A method may lead one to delightful discoveries. But, alas ! it demands an effort. Will a lukewarm person be able to endure it ? To undertake, and then to

abandon, is demoralizing. Perhaps he will do better to be content with a simple reading devoted to Holy Mass, and suited to his own dispositions.

Have books treating of the Holy Sacrifice and Holy Communion, or of some other Eucharistic subject. Books on the Passion are also suitable. Lastly, make Jesus real to yourself, and, as it were, perceptible; steep yourself in His loveliness and in His sorrows, in His kindness and purity, and, above all, in His tender affection: stop from time to time to think what all this deserves and demands.

Look out books, so that you may be able to vary your reading, for well-known forms are apt to become stale. A good book is bread and air and life! How much we are to blame for not taking more care to provide ourselves with such an aid!*

iii. *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament.*—1. There is nothing less formal than this pious practice. No bell summons us; no congregation is there on our arrival. You are almost alone, perhaps quite alone, if you wish to be. The mystery of the silence and the shadow is all about you. On all sides arises a sense of the supernatural which by degrees steals you away from the life of to-day. Soon you will perceive that there

* Such an aid we have tried to provide in *Méthodes et Formules pour bien entendre la Messe.*

are only two beings in the midst of the void, two beings closely united, Jesus and yourself. Muffled sounds come from outside, like distant echoes from another world; the monotonous ticking of a clock, the buzzing of an insect, or the cry of some passing bird, and they seem as if they only occurred in order to recall you gently to a sense of reality. Yes, Jesus is really there, and He hears and sees you; and you, too, are there indeed, bringing Him such a little good-will with so many heavy woes.

2. As you approach the altar, repeat the words of confidence and hope which were spoken for you: "*Come to Me all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.*"

Come still nearer; come as close as you can. The nearer you are, the more keen will be your impression that you are being heard.

Tell your needs and regrets and desires, and if your poverty is so great that you can find no feeling to utter, let your posture speak for you: you are on your knees, and therefore you adore and humble yourself, and make supplication; and, moreover, why are you there, if it be not to bring to Jesus all you can affirm or testify? Once more, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament is above all a *proceeding*, for in your own dwelling, as from every place, you can make yourself heard; but a proceeding receives its value

from the very fact of undertaking it. If it is dumb, it nevertheless says something; and if it is quite short, it still attains its end.

3. Do not prolong the visit beyond your devotion. Do not try to say too much: you would run a risk of forming within yourself the sense of secret aversion that comes from weariness. One soon gives up what is only kept up by force. If you were fervent, this danger would be unknown to you, and this rule would not apply to you. Deal with yourself as one deals with those who are convalescent. Later on, in spite of all the weariness of your first quarter of an hour, you will be able to lengthen your adoration sometimes for half an hour or even longer, for this compulsion often causes unforeseen ardour to arise. In the meantime, give what you possess, do what you can, and undertake nothing that you are not in a state to keep up. A visit lasting two minutes, if it took place every day, would bring about an appreciable improvement in the long run. What shall we say of several little visits, if Jesus is under our roof?

4. Wisdom which should regulate the length, should also control the method of the visits. If you can only express your adoration, the offering of yourself, and your desire to love, with brevity, do not take too long over these acts; if you cannot talk to Jesus about Himself, talk to Him of yourself: pass in review

at His feet the hours that have flown since the morning, now making your particular examen. You can also use a book. If need be, recite your vocal prayers slowly. Once more, what you are doing is to make a *visit* which was not obligatory, it is an act of friendship : how can Jesus help taking notice of it ? Later on, let us hope that it will be the happy outcome of the intimacy of which this exercise is, along with communion, the most human ideal.

iv. *Spiritual Reading.*—This exercise is a great and easy means of education. The soul, indeed, is trained by ideas and feelings.

There must be ideas first of all ; but in order to arise, they require either the presence of objects to evoke them, which is the best way, or else of speech or reading to provide them mediately. But, since the object of faith is invisible and far off, speech and reading are the two sole vehicles for truths of this order.

On the other hand, ideas act upon us solely by their *presence.* It is useless for them to be so near us as to be awakened at the first reminder : if this reminder does not occur, they remain latent and inactive. The object of spiritual reading is, then, both to extend the field of our knowledge in the domain of religious truths, and to bring back to the surface the truths which would remain useless, if left buried in the depths of our memory.

And further, even the things that we know become still clearer to us by reading about them, for they then appear in the peculiar light which they borrow from another intelligence. Often a learned person will say : " I knew that, but I know it better since reading such and such a book."

Feelings spring from ideas ; they develop from long contact with them. Meditation is unrivalled for helping on their production and progress. If as yet, poor lukewarm soul, you know not how to meditate, do not despair ; there are other ways of generating this holy productivity : the zeal of other souls may pass into you by the warmth of their written word. Choose your authors well. Our libraries are full of treasures which are often ignored.

Do you want to find both the illumination that enlightens and the strength that uplifts ? Read the lives of holy souls and great Christians, especially lives abounding in incident. It is always said that examples communicate their enthusiasm. The reason is that they act upon the two dispositions which are so necessary in spite of their danger, and which are also so powerful : *imitation* and *emulation*. The characteristics of greatness, piety, goodness, renunciation, and the like, go to one's heart like the penetration of an arrow. " Could I not do what such and such persons have done ?" we ask with St. Augustine.

The mind is struck with a clear view of truth and of its requirements ; the heart is inflamed by the sight of moral beauty, and character is formed by the repetition of such impressions. St. Ignatius is not the only one who has been converted by reading. The life of St. Antony gave as many hermits to the desert as there were letters in the narrative. Even if the example is far above our means, it always arouses a thrill of good-will. It is like a breeze that fills the sails.

If you do not make a daily meditation, look to reading for the training of your thoughts and feelings. If your meditations are imperfect, look to this exercise for a supplement and an auxiliary. In our days, good books abound. Those which one cannot keep by one may be procured through a friend. There is no need to linger over the matter as one does in meditation, nor to revert with facility to some familiar subject: rather change is required to keep up one's interest and to maintain one's appetite.

Reading every day is far the best way ; not that it is not very useful apart from this regularity ; but it almost always happens that an intermittent practice gets abandoned. Habit is an unrivalled mainstay : what has been done yesterday and on the preceding days comes back of itself at the usual hour.

v. *Reading with Meditation.*—1. Do not persuade yourself that meditation is a diffi-

cult thing: this is a mistake; do not allege your own experience: for you did it badly.

The methods you have read, and perhaps tried, have doubtless disconcerted you. They show the procedure for getting from a subject what it contains of thoughts and feelings and practical applications. All this seems very complicated, and certainly requires a great deal of labour.

What would you say if you were to be spared this toil; if, on every subject, thoughts and feelings and resolutions were to be found ready-made, and if all you had to do was to take a little trouble to read carefully in order to understand thoroughly, and to dwell upon feelings in order to assimilate them, and to examine honestly whether, among those put forward, you have adopted those that are most suitable to your state? Could you not undertake to make such a meditation?

Certainly! Very well, your only embarrassment will be that of having to choose. Formerly, books were rare; people were taught to do without them. To-day, they abound; and people should be taught to use them.

That this kind of meditation, *which assimilates*, is of equal value with that *which creates*, we are far from saying, but is it not excellent as a beginning? A child learns to write by copying; a man becomes an artist by imitating a model. So try to find a good book;

if need be, try several ; but end by fixing on the one that is best adapted to your moral temperament.

2. Do not open it until you have put yourself definitely in the presence of God and implored His help.

a. Do not read quickly, and do not be eager to find extraordinary views, neglecting simple and familiar truths. Is not bread, the common food, the main part of our nourishment ?

If your reading does not stir you in any way, do not conclude that it is useless. If it does not stir you up, it acts as a reminder, it brings before you once more the truths of the faith. A simple assent to what you read sows your soul with meritorious acts, because they are supernatural, and with efficacious acts, because they are living.

b. If you are persuaded, like most people, that feelings are entirely spontaneous, you will be inclined to condemn anyone who endeavours to make them arise. But this is not at all the case. Look at what is done ordinarily. When you wish to make a child regret any fault, to become more generous, and even to be more rightly affectionate towards you, you reason with him and exhort him. And do you not do the same with friends who have gone astray ?

But, in order to be awakened, all these feelings require to be excited by reflections,

and these reflections can only arise from thoughts. Whether you get them from a book, or from the spoken word, is it not in either case an exterior action? And if you lend yourself to this action, what are you doing but stirring yourself up? It is, then, not enough to find the thoughts, you must be penetrated with them, if they are to stir your feelings to the depths. There they awaken gratitude or regret, desire or fear, and, above all, confidence and good-will. To allow yourself to become penetrated with them is not to look for something new; it is not even to clear up a problem; it means honestly confining one's attention to what one sees and feels.

Will you follow a piece of advice that will bring you pleasant surprises? *Formulate* your feelings, and go so far as to give them as definite an *expression* as if you were speaking. And, indeed, if you are alone, why should you not utter them in a low voice? To oblige yourself to do this will prevent you from vagueness of thinking, which is the great evil of daily practices, and thus you will be at once brought face to face with reality.

Some people, instead of speaking thus, prefer to write. They let their pen run, and thus tell God, Jesus, and Mary, things that would not occur to them otherwise. If there are some drawbacks which it is easy to think

of, there is much that is highly helpful in this practice.

c. What you think and feel must be transformed into practical resolutions: I will do this, I will avoid that, I will make use of such and such a means. Make resolutions appropriate to the subject, if possible, or, at any rate, general resolutions, such as: greater watchfulness over yourself, saying your prayers better, more frequent intercourse with God. It is often enough to renew with greater determination the resolution made at one's last confession.

3. It goes without saying that prayer should accompany every reflection or feeling or resolution. According to one's needs, one asks for light, or desire, or affection, or regret, or good-will.

When a feeling comes to you, keep it; do not look farther; express it in order to maintain it and to develop it. A few moments passed in this way produce all the effect intended.

We do not say that there are no higher and more fruitful kinds of meditation; nor that the effort which strains our inner powers does not impart to them, as to an arrow, a greater force of penetration; but a humble reading, with meditation, already is enough to bring to light forgotten truths, to awaken in the heart feelings that are asleep, and to bring the forgetful, and sometimes sinful, child constantly back to His Father.

vi. *Meditation.*—1. If you timidly yearn for more personal and intimate meditation, do not be afraid. To you, as to His first disciples, the divine Master says: "Come and see." And He will lead you to His lowly dwelling. You will find it pleasant and serene; you will see how easy and familiar and amiable is everything in it. Under these happy impressions, your soul will become His disciple. You will find what you know already, and a host of things you are ignorant of will be imparted to you. When, and in what way? You cannot tell. Sometimes it will seem to you that, in your silence, you get no single word from on high, and that your waiting is but a waste of time. Go on and hope; after many weary, sad and empty days, an hour of fulness will bring you the result that has been slowly won by patience.

2. To meditate is to try to see, and to see farther, and to see clearer. But, in order to see thus, you must look long; you must also frequently pass the same things in review. To meditate is to enter into the region of light. Light is not closely confined to heaven; it breaks forth by numerous openings, and fills the world with its fragmentary gleams. The beautiful order of creation makes the divine perfections constantly shine forth: on all sides there are flashes of power, of goodness, of wisdom, and of magnificence

and love. Our own conscience and the conscience of humanity convey to us the precepts of goodness, a moral illumination ; the Gospel revelation adds thereto the law of perfection which was fitted for man, but which man knew not. From a small number of dogmatic truths arises an admirable code of laws : each of the words of Jesus and each example that He set, these together form a rich whole that applies to everything.—Such is the pasture of the soul in search of light, such is the beginning on earth of that life which is called the eternal life of *truth*.

3. The constant tendency of God is to come near us. By meditation, we go to meet Him. Hence we fight against the unhappy tendency of our nature, which is also constant, to return upon ourselves. But, to go to God, is to go to the *good*, not only to contemplate it, but to conform to it and to unite one's self to it ; and in uniting one's self to it, to perfect one's self in all things, whether it be work or detachment or suffering or love of one's relations, or in the joyful fulfilment of the existence that is marked out for us.

4. In meditation, God makes Himself heard secretly ; He imparts views that are not gained by learning, He transforms our tastes, He arouses our generosity, He spiritualizes the soul, while leaving her as human as her individual position requires.

Without meditation, the soul takes but short-sighted views; she is given over to the maxims of this world alone; she is thoughtless and ignorant, for to meditate is nothing else than to listen to what she thinks as to the *thing that is*.

5. A person is only really incapable of meditating, if he is so from having contrary tastes, or from the habitual shirking of duty. We instinctively meditate on everything that is of interest to us.

But although this incapacity may be genuine, it is curable: the best means of cure is a meditation which, if at first imperfect, is generously attempted. It requires effort, and persevering effort: it also needs help, like the choice of a good book and the patient application of rules laid down by experience.

Expedients.—If you have no books or if you do not enjoy books, have recourse to one of the following expedients:

1. Imagine as vividly as you can a station of the Cross (the place, the persons, etc.), then give yourself up to feelings of compassion, love, regret, or of ardent desire,—regain confidence, calm yourself, and be generous in resolution.

2. Some people find it a good thing to make their meditation in the form of an examination of conscience: a deeper and more devout examination than the evening one, an examination that goes more thor-

oughly into some particular duty. The commandments of God and of the Church may be taken in order to get a better understanding of their importance, scope, and application ; or else one may take the capital sins. The summary of Christian morals given in our second volume may be used in the same way.

3. Lanicius suggests an ingenious means, which consists in *making one's confession* to Jesus Christ. Kneel down and ask for His blessing in the usual way ; recite the *Confiteor*, and make your accusations very explicitly. After finishing the *Confiteor*, listen in silence to everything that Our Lord says to you : manifested love, reproaches, encouragements, desires, hopes,—means suggested. Thank Him and adopt His suggestions, accept His will, make your promises to Him. Finally, bend your head to receive His absolution.

4. If, on some occasions, you find you are so engrossed by business that you cannot dismiss it from your mind, boldly resolve to speak about it to Our Lord (not to speak to yourself of it, for this would only aggravate the evil). Open your mind fully to Him, but always keeping your attention upon Him, and waiting to listen to Him. Take up your usual subject next day.

5. Why not have recourse for once in a way to vocal prayers ? Recite them slowly, lingering on each word and not fearing to

dwell heavily on it for some time. This is an invaluable resource for times of absolute dryness.

6. There are numerous methods: you will find them elsewhere: here we prefer to put before you, under the form of a memento, a *tabular sketch* of the acts comprised in a meditation. Copy it on to a sheet, which you can have under your eyes, to fecundate the thought you have met with in your reading.

A Tabular Sketch for Meditations

Preparation.

Impress yourself with the presence of God.

Have a keen sense of your own weakness.

Meditation.

First read in your book, and then *work upon* what you have read by reflection, feeling, and will.

i. *Reflections.*—If it is a question of an incident, imagine:

1. The place:
2. The persons:
3. What they are doing:
4. What they are saying:
5. What they are thinking and feeling.

If it is a question of a truth, consider :

1. Its necessity—its advantages—God's wishes.

2. Your own feelings and conduct with regard thereto : your appreciation ? your efforts ? your failings ?

ii. *Affections.* — According to circumstances :

1. Admiration — praise — thanksgiving — love ;

2. Confusion and grief — honourable amends ;

3. Offering of self — promises — desires (always sincere, even if not sensibly felt)— expressed—repeated ;—prayers and appeals to Mary and to the Sacred Heart, etc.

iii. *Resolutions.*—1. Not general and vague but particular and actual ;

2. Practical—*i.e.*, including the means to succeed.

Note.—All this spiritual work must be steeped in prayer,—renew the prayer at every point.

II.—An Attempt at the Interior Life ; or Spiritual Retreats and Aspirations

i. The importance of this means and its suitability to the lukewarm.—ii. Its two distinct exercises.—iii. Counsels as to the practice of the presence of God ; different means ; how often, and how long ?—iv. Counsels as to aspirations : for the lukewarm they are rather ordered than spontaneous. Practical means.—v. The union of the two exercises.

i. *The Part played by the Interior Life, and its Adaptation to the Life of the Lukewarm.*

Exercises of devotion have rather the character of official proceedings ; they take place at certain hours, and are clothed in certain fixed forms. Life with God suggests what is purely inward. Any time is fit, any situation is acceptable, and any disposition can be met by its adaptations.

But is not this means too high, and is it not reserved for the specially favoured ? Can it be advantageously offered to those who are kept in the depths of lukewarmness ? No doubt, the interior life is the life of the perfect ; but it is more than that, it is life pure and simple ; and so it must be found to a certain extent in every soul and in every exercise. Without it, prayer is empty and our ordinary actions are merely inanimate. When it is intense, it be-

comes the true life of prayer; when it is feeble and difficult, it is still a supernatural effort.

Do not then be astonished if St. Francis of Sales gives this exercise the first place for efficacy, and says of it: "In it lies the great work of devotion; it may take the place of all the rest, but it cannot be made up for by any other means."

Read through, and read over again, the two chapters of the *Introduction to a Devout Life* (Book II., chs. xii. and xiii.), in which the holy Doctor treats the subject fully. His masterly teaching has not grown older; his counsels, his devout devices, and his very comparisons, are good for all time, as it happens when the subject is a vital one, and when the writer is deeply acquainted with the human heart.

Our part is to apply this mighty means to the lukewarm, *i.e.*, to those who have little knowledge and scarcely any will-power. St. Francis of Sales was speaking to the fervent, who, in order to unite with God, have only to recollect themselves, and who, in order to converse with Him, have only to use the help of their own hearts. The lukewarm find no such resources within themselves. To think of God, they have to constrain themselves, and to converse with Him, they often have to borrow both feelings and expressions. Well, then, poor lukewarm

soul, since we have this means left to us, let us go to God by the *will* and not by being drawn to Him, by way of duty and not by way of inclination. Besides, what does it matter? Everything depends upon reaching Him; but we shall surely do so, since it is written: "*The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.*"

You are like the sick who have no appetite, and whom the doctor orders to eat nevertheless. They do it at first by obedience; but by degrees health returns, and they soon do it with relish. In the same way you will recollect yourselves from time to time, because you are advised to do so; you will make aspirations as one recites a prescribed prayer; and recollection will bring you a little of the invigorating breath of heaven, and the aspirations will bring into play your benumbed affective faculties. Even if you believe all your feelings are dead, do not be discouraged: has not science lately proved the unforeseen power of rhythmical artificial movements over apparent death?

First, let us try to give some very clear explanations to bring you to a decision, and to show some easy exercises which may open before you a beaten path.

ii. *Its Two Distinct Exercises.*

1. First of all, note that this interior life comprises two exercises which are distinct, but which naturally unite and complete each other : *spiritual retreats* and *aspirations*. The former bring God into our hearts ; the latter cast our hearts upon God.

The first exercise prevents dissipation of mind, and fixes its attention upon God ever present ; it *recollects* us, *i.e.*, it gathers up our thoughts, which are habitually scattered amongst the things of life, and puts them into contact with the unseen. We then become seers ; we feel that we are eternal beings : God and His creature meet together.

The second exercise corresponds with the first. The unseen, once called forth, awakens our feelings. Aspirations set them free, and express them. Without them, the impressions we receive would not come to fulfilment, and there would be no movement of life.

2. These two exercises are too often confused together. This would not matter much, if it were merely a mistake of analysis ; but the mistake of analysis is here due to a misunderstanding of the mechanism of the soul and of its laws. If you merely advise a person to multiply his invocations, he will soon find his energy gone, and that he is worn out and weary, and, as it were, empty : no water has flowed into the cistern, and

hence none can be drawn from it. He should have been told to recollect himself from time to time, to renew his store of good thoughts and feelings, and thus to nourish the source from which the aspirations of the heart would afterwards proceed. This recommendation is of the highest importance to the lukewarm ; but not nearly so important to the fervent who practise recollection habitually, and whose fount is always full.

On the other hand, if you speak to the lukewarm soul only of the presence of God, you run a risk of leaving him dumb and inert. He will think that God is there and looking upon him ; but he will not oblige himself to express his feelings ; no doubt he will do so when his feelings are warm, but such occasions are scarce ; generally, he will be gloomy and sad and unfruitful, like land under a wintry sky. Realize and formulate your affections, and repeat some short prayers : warmth is only produced by movement ; and habits are only trained by the repetition of acts.

Do not, then, be satisfied with thinking of God more or less vaguely : endeavour to tell Him not only your feelings towards Him (this, alas ! is done only too quickly), but at least a few of the beautiful things that the Saints have uttered, and which, in your poverty, you offer Him in the humble, bu' really genuine, shape of a *desire*.

St. Francis of Sales, then, was quite right to deal with spiritual retreats and aspirations independently; but with his unerring judgement, he takes care not to separate them: the spiritual retreat fosters aspirations, and aspirations in their turn make them bear fruit. They are a complete whole, each part of which, indeed, has its laws and also its own expedients.

iii. *Counsels as to the Presence of God.*

To remind one's self of the presence of God is, as we have said, a way of drawing God into one's self, or, rather, of discovering Him within one: one receives an impression of the divine presence, or, at least, one sets it seriously before one's mind.

1. All the masters of the spiritual life teach that this recollection may be made by the mere *insight of faith.* Yes, God is everywhere. He is there, He regards me and penetrates me through and through. It is He who makes my heart beat and who sends the blood coursing through my arteries to nourish my life. He is in the air that I breathe, and in the grain of sand that I tread under foot; and everywhere He is infinite. "*Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.*"

2. This insight of faith may be helped by *sensible* comparisons: I am in God like a

bird flying in space, like a sponge in the depths of the ocean and saturated with its waters (see *The Introduction to a Devout Life*, part ii., ch. ii.).

3. Would you like to have a more lively and tender means of approach? Then, like St. Stephen at the time of his martyrdom, love to repeat: "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Indeed, Jesus, who is not everywhere, still follows us with His eyes wherever we are; this is one of His privileges as the head of mankind. Oh, why do we allow Him thus to look upon us always, and that in vain?

4. Or you may imagine Jesus in the attitude which He seems to take up by preference in our own days. He is standing with sadness on His brow. His hand is pointing to His heart amidst the flames burning in His breast. This heart is enwreathed with a crown of thorns, and displays a gaping wound, and is surmounted by a cross; a lively and speaking emblem of His love and sorrow and expectation.

5. If you have a feeling of attraction and confidence towards the Blessed Virgin Mary, do not hesitate. This good mother regards you unceasingly, not directly, like Jesus, but in God in whom everything is reflected. Yes, all that you do is seen by her, and all that you say is heard by her: I run to and fro,

I talk as a child talks to his mother. What protection! What encouragement! What consolation!

6. Holy Scripture affords us thousands of words which are full of God. *"O Lord, I am ever with Thee"*—*"I see my God ever before me"*—*"I have lifted up mine eyes unto Thee, O God, who dwellest in the heavens"*—*"Mine eyes are ever unto the Lord"* (quoted by St. Francis of Sales).

In the Psalms, look up some of the striking images which are so much more effective than your own thoughts; they are full of grace. The words of God alone have a creative force; it is true that His friends' words also come from Him.

7. This practice of spiritual retreats is joined with meditation, of which they are a reminder. You have steeped yourself in some mystery; you have an impression of the place where it occurred; you took the resolution of going back to it from time to time; a capital practice. St. Francis of Sales counsels it in his admirable style: "The birds have nests to fly to in case of need; the stags have their forests and copses to which they flee for refuge from the hunter or from the heat of the sun; and thus should our heart daily choose a place, either in the wounds of Jesus Christ, or else somewhere near Him, to which we may withdraw from time to time."

A spiritual retreat, however brief it may be, involves a definite repose. It means a halt; hence it is not enough to call up a fleeting memory. It is regaining possession of yourself, or rather, a brief ascent towards heaven. No doubt, you will have to *order* yourself to make these holy halts, you must bind yourself to think about them, and use all your energies in carrying them out duly; but the result is worth the trouble, and custom will soon do away with the need of an effort.

How long should these spiritual retreats last? Each person can only learn by experience. Make them long enough to feel that you are really under the eyes of God and *penetrated* with a sense of *His presence*. Such is their aim. It is attained more or less quickly according to our dispositions at the time; on some occasions, a moment suffices; at other times, a more prolonged effort becomes necessary. But do not force yourself to persist when the endeavour becomes wearisome.

Do not despise external means: kneeling down, when one is alone, *sensibly* expresses one's adoration and gives body to one's thoughts—look continuously at some devotional picture—embrace the crucifix several times—pray with outstretched arms—turn towards some church where Jesus dwells in the tabernacle—all these things act upon the senses and help to impress one. Do not bind yourself to any practice which

is too troublesome, for you will soon give it up ; but be on your guard against letting that be a pretext for rejecting any means that cost you something to use. Once more, remember that a sick person must sometimes make an effort, even merely to draw breath.

iv. *Counsels as to Aspirations.*

If only you were one of those of whom St. Francis of Sales speaks : "Those who love one another with a human and natural love are entirely taken up with this love. What a number of remembrances and thoughts and praises and protestations they make ! So those who are thoroughly steeped in the love of God are ever thinking and speaking of Him. They would like, if only they had all men's hearts in their power, to engrave the sacred name of Jesus on them !"

Alas ! poor lukewarm soul, you do not find in your heart this impulse towards God, nor any feeling that thrills you when in His presence, nor the words that overflow from the fulness of the heart ; you merely desire, but desire sincerely, to take some means of approaching Him and of stirring up your love. Be of good courage ! God cannot fail to answer your advances, and you know that He is the only being who is satisfied with being *loved with the mind.* Besides, can He not see the future, and. it may be, in this

future, the fervour, and, perhaps, the intimacy, that your efforts are preparing for you?

As an easy means, we recommend you to repeat with faith some indulgenced invocation, a few thoughts that you have gathered from your spiritual reading, and particularly any feelings that have already gripped your heart.

"There are several collections of ejaculatory prayers," says St. Francis of Sales, "and I deem them very useful." If he does not advise Philothea to bind herself to the use of them, it is because his Philothea is able to find within her words which are perhaps no sweeter, but entirely her own.

Certainly, tell God your feelings towards Him, and what you look for from His fatherly care; tell Him, above all, the feelings you would fain possess (desire is the riches of the poor), but do not look down upon aspirations which are borrowed. Many of them come from the heart of God Himself. They have passed through the soul of a prophet or of an Apostle. They have fired the heart of a martyr. Saintly lips have sown them by the way, or have sweetened their solitude with them. Others give in outline all the path to follow, and the Church is so desirous that we should repeat them that she attaches rich treasures to their repetition.

Make a choice of these sacred arrows, which carry as far as heaven itself, and, in order to have your arsenal always ready, get

them on little leaflets with which you can intersperse your books of devotion.

Besides, it is not necessary to use a large number of these forms : two or three, or one only, if constantly repeated, will be enough to give life to a week or a day. It is like a chorus which one hums as one works, and which, by repetition, sinks into the depths of our being. "Sweet Heart of Jesus, be my love!"—"Sweet heart of Mary, be my salvation!"—"Lord, help me!"—"O my God, have mercy upon me, because Thou art good!"—"Keep me under the shelter of Thy wings!"—Sometimes it is a good thing to confine one's self to what is simplest and least exacting : "O my God, I am Thy child, and I love Thee!"—"Thy love, O my God!"—While you are *at work*, be satisfied with affirming that you unite with the *will of God* : "Thy will, O God!"—"I love Thy will!"—"It is for Thee, O my God!"

If, between two confessions, you happen to fall again, and feel discouraged, take care not to give up the means of using aspirations ; begin, if you like, with regrets or with the desire of having such regrets, and, if the sins are not mortal sins, do not esteem yourself the less loved on account of your fresh failings, and go on with your protestations of affection. Even if you are gravely in the wrong, utter some acts of repentance which are already, perhaps, acts of love.

v. *The Union of the Two Exercises.*

In order that your moments of retreat may not remain of a *mental* character only, and that they may develop into *aspirations:* "Consider what God is doing and what you are doing; you will see that He always is looking down upon you with eyes full of inconceivable love."*—So much for recollection.—"O my God," you will say, "why is it that I do not always regard Thee as Thou regardest me? Why thinkest Thou so much, O Lord, of me, and why do I think so rarely of Thee? What hast thou come to, O my soul? Thy true place is in God, and where art thou?"* So much for the aspirations.

Let your aspirations, too, be a recollection, a lasting feeling awakened by a prolonged look.

You will find in the *Introduction to a Devout Life* numerous fine applications of this doctrine, which we have tried to adapt to the feebleness of the lukewarm. An abundance of points of view and of counsels is put forward solely to enlighten and guide you in your choice; but be on your guard, we cannot insist upon it too much, against hampering this exercise with complicated and troublesome practices.

* From *St. Francis of Sales.*

III.—The Right Use of the Sacraments

It was not without some fear that we suggested this powerful and subtle remedy for the first state.

Here we say unhesitatingly to him who wishes to shake off all lukewarmness once for all: Go to confession and communion as often as you can; by degrees you will find yourself imperceptibly transformed. To this counsel and to this promise we add only one condition, but it is an indispensable one; it is that you prepare for them always with *fitting care.*

I

One of the most pernicious mistakes is to make the frequency of communion depend upon the amount of *perfection acquired* or *relish experienced.* The truth is that it must be regulated by *results.*

The mistake arises from considering in the Sacrament too much the ideal of union with Jesus in joy, and too little the other ideal, which unites Jesus with us in our wretchedness: the action of divine mercy.

Note well: communion is made for men *as they are:* this is why it is used as a *remedy;* but medicine is often taken without any liking for it, and merely by an act of will. O Jesus, dost Thou, then, allow a poor luke-

warm soul in her indifference and cowardice, and with all her evil tendencies, to come to Thee without any great desire of Thee for Thine own sake, and to receive Thee in Holy Communion with so little love in her heart? Yes, indeed, provided that she come to the Sacrament for healing.

And wouldst thou, O well-beloved soul, for thy part, acquiesce in receiving everything and in giving nothing? Wouldst thou, indeed, see thyself surrounded with love that is astounding, even in a God, and yet not revolt against a coldness that ends in being worse than the worst ingratitude? There will be many communions, perhaps, before thy heart begins to open, or thy dumb lips utter any word of affection; but, nevertheless, a day will come when thy sense of dignity and justice and love will awaken, and when the blood that thou hast so often drunk will at last seethe in thy veins; it will not be a perfect cure, but it will be convalescence, and convalescence means a beginning of strength as well as of enjoyment, and it is, above all, a day of hope.

And how does all this come about?

The office of the Eucharist is to feed. It is bread and wine, the ordinary nourishment: "*My flesh is meat indeed: and My blood is drink indeed. . . . He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life.*"

But what is the characteristic of the lukewarm? It is impoverishment of life, and consequently, impotence in reacting. One has only to infuse them with what is a restorative element, and to get them to assimilate it, and they lift up their heads, recover, and go on their way.

However, we must not forget (and this remark will explain the sad phenomenon which is too often met with, communions that do no good), that, if it is enough for the Sacrament, in order to increase *sanctifying grace*, to find it already in existence, to however small an extent; yet, in order to increase spiritual *vitality*, It must find that grace in a state of activity: and our co-operation is necessary for this.* It is useless

* The principles first published in this book in 1900 have since been confirmed by the Decree of 1905 on *Frequent Communion*. This Decree requires, not perfection, but a certain fervour. By implication it confirms the distinction drawn between the increase of *sanctifying grace* and the increase of *spiritual activity*. Hence, it (1) *demands* "*the intention of pleasing God, of uniting with Him more closely by charity, and of using this divine remedy against infirmities and defects*"; and (2) *recommends* "*ensuring a careful preparation for Holy Communion, and a suitable thanksgiving to follow it.*"

In Volume II. will be found an explanation of the reason why the increase of sanctifying grace, which is a true increase of our *supernatural nature*, does not increase, *ipso facto*, its *vitality* (see Pt. II. ch. ii.). This explanation shows: (1) Spiritual vitality depends upon actual graces; (2) Communion gives a right to such graces, according to our dispositions; (3) our co-

for a medicine to be able to cure; it will only effect a cure, if it is aided with a corresponding action on the part of our interior energies.

It is for the confessor to fix the frequency. Here he will be guided by what seems useful. The repetition of certain sins, persistent defects, are not a sufficient reason for diminishing the number, and still less is continued deadness. As long as you accompany your communions with due preparation and thanksgiving, you have no reason to fear any abuse.

If, being lukewarm, you still hesitate, looking upon yourself as a stranger, hear the divine Master crying out to His servants: "*Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and the feeble and the blind and the lame.*" "*Go out into the highways and hedges; and compel them to come in.*" And if you are ashamed of your rags, remember that, in our good God's entrance-hall, as in the houses of the Jews of old, are to be found festival garments

operation is required to make the right available, the impulse imparted by actual grace dying away, if we do not put our personal activity into it.

Frequent, and even daily, communion will not be abused, if the two essential conditions of the Decree are observed: a *right* intention dispels human respect and formalism, a *devout* intention implies supernatural dispositions. The latter disposition is present, if communicating involves some personal effort.

for all who are invited : the confessional, the divine dressing-room, clothes the soul with the merits of Jesus.

From the time when Jesus became food and willed to give Himself into the hands of the sick ; from the time when He refused to heal them by way of miracle ; He foresaw the long years of waiting and the terrible falls, and He does not reckon up the number of His future forgivenesses. But, despite appearances and all human fears, the cure is being secretly prepared : there is some movement in the depths of the soul ; and efforts, even if unsuccessful, are nevertheless vital acts ; the soul raises her aspirations somewhat higher, and God condescends a little lower.

II

With regard to *confession*, it is the unhappy rule to have recourse to it only before communion, and thus it becomes merely a preliminary accessory of the latter.

If communion is a medicine, confession is still more so. It restores life, stimulates activity, supports courage, and stamps a direction on the soul.

Are you robbed by circumstances of the help of communion ? It is only one more reason to have recourse to that of confession. Confession may take place at any time, and

be renewed as often as one likes. Even if your dispositions are not good, go to it all the same. Who knows if it will not help you to find them? For, in the main, your procedure is an act of simple confidence and of imperfect good-will. God takes account of it. And then, you put yourself under the sacred influence of the priest. The lukewarm need an outside help, a visible witness, an inspiring activity. The repetition of promises and quick recoveries get one ready for healing.

Does this mean to say that confession infallibly produces amendment? Certainly not! for the abuse of it may bring about an exactly opposite result.—Our enemies are not always wrong in blaming confession for its weakening and lowering effect: you confess grave sins, and, as soon as they are forgiven, you lose, along with the sense of your guilt, the feeling that you have done wrong, the fear of future sin, and the will to make an effective resistance. After all, what are these sins which are so easily and so quickly wiped out? And why should one be so much on one's guard against them, when there is at hand an unfailing means of getting rid of them afterwards by a secret avowal? Some among the lukewarm would not acknowledge such low ideas, but, in reality, it is under their influence that they act.

Confession, in order to attain its end, which is to cure, must, then, jealously preserve everything within us which is calculated to second the action of the sacraments: sensitiveness of conscience and the worthiness of repentance. You will place yourself in these conditions, if you have the courage to follow the recommendations of this progressive method, of which we here briefly recapitulate the heads:

1. *Clearness.*—Bring your attention to bear on a little number of sins, and go back to their cause;

2. *Earnestness.*—Keen contrition which strongly repels the evil, and revives the vitality of the soul;

3. *Practical Means.*—Only one resolution each time: a resolution adapted to your needs and submitted to your confessor.

II.—Training and Consolidation

1. To form the spiritual life, and, above all, to consolidate it, nothing is as practical and effective as a *scheme*.

Do not be alarmed at the word, but take the matter in hand simply, and see it as it is. To bind one's self to a scheme is not to get rid of one's freedom, but to put it under discipline : good order saves time and secures peace. To live without any plan (written or customary) is to abandon one's self to caprice ; but caprice is a spendthrift of everything, both of strength and time. When one does not know beforehand what one is going to do, one is uncomfortable as to how to act, and especially discontented at having done nothing, or at having blundered.

The scheme or plan may be compared to goodness ; for, like virtue, it gives the *facility* that comes of habit. If it is drawn up according to God's intentions, it *fixes us* in His will, and becomes an *integral part* of His universal design. Every act that it brings about is clothed with all the beautiful and meritorious *intentions* with which it was worked out, and receives the *direct influence* of divine grace.

God, who is, *par excellence*, the free Being, God Himself sets Himself a plan to realize,

an order to follow. If He were to do otherwise, He would be no longer wise and perfect.

For the lukewarm, a scheme is particularly advantageous. You are not attracted, like the fervent, to exercises of piety and to troublesome duties; you will not go on with them long, if you do not place them under the protection of a *kind of law*, which will recur to your faithfulness to-morrow and help you to recover self-possession.

The great evil of your state, the deeply-rooted evil which keeps you down, is weakness of will; but, the constant use of a scheme, even if it be a very unpretentious one, *develops* this power in a most happy manner, for it is made up of a thousand little daily triumphs.

Yet, we shall take care not to advise you to take up a complicated and difficult scheme, which would lead to discouragement. But, if it were only rudimentary, it would help to fix you, to calm you, and to teach you to will; if it were rather more embracing, it would contribute to a more serious training, provided that it did not outrun your strength: the essential thing is that you should not be led to get rid of it as a burden that is too heavy to bear.

The suggestions we are about to give are rather numerous, merely because we desire to enable you to make the most suitable *choice*.

2. A scheme aims at two objects: what may be strictly termed the *regulation*, and the *direction* of one's life, which in a way constitute its material, and its moral, organization.

I.—THE REGULATION

You will not only decide upon the *things* you will have to do, but also on the *time* when you will do each one of them. It should be well understood that everything is merely approximate, and that it admits of all justifiable exceptions.

1. Some people can never keep fixed hours: going to bed is put off according to carelessness or fancy, and getting up suffers by way of compensation; but unpunctuality in rising usually affects the regularity of one's exercises of devotion and the right distribution of one's time. Hence, there must be a definite time for getting up, and it must be kept to in spite of any passing indisposition.

2. Begin your day with prayer and spiritual reading; thus you will carry out this duty with pleasure, ease, and constancy. If you leave the hour for these exercises undetermined, you will always live in discomfort, you will often be unfaithful, and you will end by giving up everything.

3. You have the duties of your position which make up the main part of your life. Look upon them as the portion of action which your Lord and Master expects of you. Give them every care, and remember that there, as everywhere else, order is an indispensable condition of success.

4. Fix a time for each of the other devotional exercises which you have thought it right to adopt : reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, rosary, etc.—Fix your days for confession and communion.—The plan may also comprise the *manner* in which such and such a thing is to be done.—Intentions are forgotten. If they are written down, one can hunt them up again.—Avoid petty details and lengthiness : amidst a crowd of complicated rules, the important ones get obscured.

II.—MORAL DIRECTION

It is very rare to meet with people who, apart from business, put an object before themselves and pursue it methodically. To choose a career and to go forward in it, and to give diligence to the means of getting a fortune—this is all that the world understands. To amend one's character and to improve its qualities—this is no doubt a solicitude, the importance of which is recognized, but upon which very little care is

bestowed. Still less do people think about giving a useful and noble aim, which is not required by circumstances, to their activities.

And what happens? Our defects live on, our moral value shows no increase, and our life remains unprofitable to the general welfare. Even our religious activity is too often narrow and shortsighted, is confined to conventional customs, merely marks time, and leaves the soul without elevation or fruitfulness: after a time, everything gets stereotyped.

Therefore, think out for yourself an ideal which gives a direction to your generosity and stimulates it. If you are young, believe that you are able to do anything. If you have attained a certain age, you can still do much, especially in the way of restoring your equilibrium: you have experience and ripeness to help you, and you will have God's help, with which all things are possible. Perhaps, such an one only required to know his duties and capacities in order to make a start on the upward path.

What part of the scheme are we, then, considering? The determination of the *line of moral conduct:* I want to get rid of such and such a defect, I want to be on my guard against such and such a hidden danger, I want to engage in such and such a work, and hence we get these three aims: improvement, watchfulness, usefulness.

i. *Improvement.*

First, see what is defective in your nature: *deficiency, excess, contrariety,* such are the points of view from which it is a good thing to look at each of our principal dispositions. We shall briefly give a few hints on the subject, which would fill a whole volume.

In order to grasp what is meant by *deficiency, excess,* and *contrariety, i.e.,* what is lacking, what goes too far, and what is irregular, nothing is as useful as a clear view of the good quality in itself. The good, indeed, is what conscience demands: if it is only plain and recognizable, it is easy at the same time to see what is inconsistent with it in one's self. Further, it has the fortunate advantage of commanding our esteem, and of drawing out our sympathy; hence it is an encouragement as well as a light.

To search only for the evils to be discovered and amended, constitutes a method which is both incomplete and ineffective. It narrows one's ideas and chills the heart. Hence we get an explanation of the lack of success of the timid direction which takes this as its one object.

Therefore lift up your eyes to the full height of the *qualities,* in which you are defective: they will win your admiration;

you will call them to you alike by your regrets and by your yearnings ; and they will come into your mind easily and quietly ; first of all, to form it, and gradually, by slow and imperceptible infusion, they will extend to your will, your actions, and your life, until they have become established in it by habit.

Elevation of feelings, with its noble impulse to admire and to be worthy in all things.—Opposite defects : low and interested motives,—*vulgar tastes* (shown in one's manners),—being indifferent as to one's inferiority,—carelessness as to sins which cannot be known,—not telling the truth,—lack of enthusiasm.

On the other hand, attempts to exalt one's self, running down others,—contrarieties such as vanity, self-sufficiency, misplaced pride.

Kindness of heart, which brings in its train tenderness, affability, devotion.—Opposite defects : dryness,—indifference,—harshness (often unconscious),—severity of judgement, strictness in upholding one's rights, even in family or community life,—little generosity to the poor, to working-men and servants,—aversions,—and, a still more radical defect, selfishness, or its likeness on a smaller scale, a spirit of individualism.—Contrarieties : over-sensitiveness, being too exacting in one's affections, etc.

Firmness.—Determination, steadfastness. —Opposite defects: hesitation,—feebleness, —giving way to influences,—rarely carrying things through, — discouragement, — breaking one's resolutions,—contrarieties: obstinacy, misguided obduracy, which is the distinctive mark of mediocrities and, above all, of warped minds.

Qualities of temperament. — Evenness of disposition, agreeableness, pleasing gaiety.—Opposite defects: showing in one's behaviour all the fluctuations of happenings around and within one, — passing from gladness to gloom for nothing at all.—Giving rein to one's ill-humour,—perpetual recriminations.

Prudence.—Opposite defects: deciding without reflection,—not avoiding possible causes of being led astray,—not knowing how to wait,—dislike of taking advice. Anyone who is naturally rather imprudent will be always complaining that he never succeeds like other people.

Which of the above dispositions do I need most?—how am I to develop it?—What hindrances shall I find?—I will do this. . . .

ii. *Watchfulness.*

The unfavourable character of our surroundings, the difficulty of the circumstances in which we find ourselves—these, too, claim our attention. No doubt we must make allowances for what is acceptable and for what is inevitable, but still there remains such and such a relationship to be given up, such and such a situation to be modified, or, at any rate, there are precautions to be taken. And this is where the phrase we have already used comes in: we must mark out a line of conduct. Too often, instead of giving a direction to one's life, one waits upon events: this is first of all an abdication of the duty of self-respect, and next, of wisdom.

Put down your observations, and what you propose to do, in writing. It is the way to discover a host of points which escape the mind, and to get a better view of things one knows already. At the same time, it is a great help against forgetfulness. Time, indeed, soon blots out memories we thought everlasting.

NOTE.—You will find some suggestive ideas in the part of the book which treats of the causes of lesser lukewarmness (pp. 140 *ff.*).

iii. *Usefulness.*

To correct one's defects and to be on the watch against dangers is not everything. One must also take heed how to turn one's life to account.

Care for this first of all involves the fulfilment of the duties of one's state of life. Who would have thought that some Christians would go so far as to violate some of the obligations of justice? For instance, they will keep their workmen waiting for their pay, and exact too much from their servants; they will show stinginess and, sometimes, little conscientiousness in small affairs; they will allow what they are put in charge of to go to ruin, and not think of blaming themselves for it, for the strange reason that they are merely doing to-day what they did yesterday and have done for a long time.

The strict duties of charity run still greater risks. People make themselves a nuisance to those around them; they put a strain on the character of others by their exacting requirements; they stir up quarrels by their irritating ways. These things are told in confession, no doubt, but they recur. And how is one to reproach one's self for deviations which nevertheless leave a certain amount of family affection behind them?

But a friendly understanding, and the satisfaction to which it gives rise, are the aim of duty, and they are also the most favourable condition for the soul's progress. No, you are not turning your life to the best advantage, unless you make it the normal field of exercise for goodness.

Another, and more evident, way of failing to utilize one's life, is to waste one's time; many people, who have hardly anything to do, still contrive to find all their time occupied. If you talk to them of studies that elevate, of devotional exercises that sanctify, of works of zeal that strip one of selfishness and contribute to the general welfare; they answer, in perfect good faith, that they have no time to give to such things. Nothing fills up life like futilities! Hence, the question is how to disengage it from all these parasitical frivolities, and to turn it towards something useful. Here are a few practical rules: forbid yourself to waste time, and keep a watch upon yourself on the point: give yourself an occupation and stick to it. Try to find out if you can do anything for your relations. Amongst the numerous works of charity, select those that are best adapted to your means and to your leanings; work for the poor, and help them in their homes; make more frequent visits among your acquaintances, to those who are in trouble or in solitude; keep up profitable

correspondence, etc. Such things will easily fill up the void in unoccupied lives, and, by a privilege of grace, they also find a place in lives which least of all belong to themselves.

Conclusion.—See what is suitable to your position and tastes. Do not try to do too much in your first efforts. After filling in your days with some useful regular occupations, you will feel your desire for action increase ; custom makes everything easy, and the doing of good, if the good be not too costly to effect, gives more satisfaction than letting one's self drift aimlessly.

Write down this amongst your resolutions : I mean to learn, or I mean to improve, in such and such a quality, even in physical strength ; I intend to make myself useful in such and such a direction, etc. : a fine programme, which it would be a good thing to draw up in outline during a retreat, and necessary to read through often.

Made in this way, your scheme will not be the futile piece of soothing commonplace which directors of souls have the annoyance as well as the sorrow of meeting with in the greater part of those that are submitted to them.

Final Advice: A Retreat.

In these improved dispositions, a retreat might be really decisive. Follow the exercises as occasion offers, or, better still, withdraw for a few days to a religious house. If that is impossible, boldly decide to make it at home. You will succeed, if your determination is firm. Have recourse to your confessor, or to the assistance of some devout person. This book, and doubtless a few passages of the second volume, may serve you at once as a subject for reading and for meditation.

Signs of Progress

I

When only a very few well-known and quite intentional venial sins are committed, and when they are sincerely repented.

II

When one watches over one's self and thinks more often of God.

III

When one has the desire, not only of getting rid of lukewarmness, but of loving God, and of indemnifying Him, and of belonging more entirely to Him.

IV

Especially the resumption of means known to be useful, and regularity in using them, in spite of weariness and dislike.

Note.—These are signs of hindrances disappearing and of spiritual life reviving.

When true submission to God is shown in a determination to avoid every venial sin, to love Him really, the will is cured : that of the *moral* nature remains to be effected in part, and then to be effected thoroughly ; this is the work of fervour. See the second volume, *From Fervour to Perfection*.

A SPECIAL STUDY OF RELAPSE

RELAPSE

I. Its Nature

Relapse is a humiliating falling away, which is dangerous but curable.

Here we think it advantageous, though at the risk of constant repetition, to add a special study of *relapse—i.e.*, of the unfortunate state of those who have allowed themselves to release the ties which bound them to God, giving up their spiritual energies and devotional habits.

More beloved, since their lives were more lovely ; more guilty, since they better knew what they have abandoned ; more difficult to bring back, since they have abused more graces, these poor souls require both a tender indulgence and an energetic lesson.

First of all, let us try to make them see the sorrowful characteristics of their falling away.

No, you do not see it, and you do not feel it. You have so little life ! Perhaps you fell away in a kind of disdain : it may be a punishment, it is often an effect of pride ; people disdain what they have not the

courage to attain to. It would cost something to acknowledge that one was inconsistent with one's principles; so these principles are no more than exaggeration and fanaticism: now we have got to the point! Does not wisdom bid us pick and choose? Well, we have left a good deal behind!

Nevertheless, you have kept the faith, and its hopes and fears, and its essential practices also. Outwardly there is no change, and those who know you still think you fervent. Some, perhaps, unwittingly humiliate you by praising your goodness.

Open your eyes, and compare the present with the past. What a contrast! Formerly you found repose, and also a few joys, in prayer; to-day you can no longer converse with God! Your communions then truly united you to Jesus; to-day, they are a constraint; they remind you of the uncomfortable relations between two persons who have ceased to understand one another. God's light shone upon your life and beautified everything; now it remains hidden behind thick clouds. If it reappears at times, it is like some vague cold gleam. This state, indeed, might be no more than a trial, an involuntary weariness. Alas! venial sins easily admitted, and just efforts habitually refused, these bring out clearly your state as one of falling away.

All goodness is not destroyed especially

so far as it is external. You can be active, amiable, generous, chaste, and patient. Because you were formerly all these, you are still thus: the formed habit continues to operate. But habit is a diminishing force, if it be not maintained. The beautiful appearances your life displays are like cut flowers, which show fair on their stems, but which will soon wither, for they get no sap from the source of life.

And does not your perseverance, which is but a relative thing, depend upon the favourable conditions in which you are placed? What is certain is, that it does not rest upon God. But, apart from God, the house is only built upon the sand; without Him, it is always badly kept! How can you promise yourself to persevere, when perseverance, ever since the fall, imperiously demands the assistance of special graces that are in no wise due to us? And if they are not due, is it because of your slackness that you are likely to obtain them? But even prayer, real prayer, is no longer there to secure them!*

Oh, if, indeed, you were only to stretch out your hand to your Father, who is only waiting for it; if you recognized your bad condition, and were resolutely resolved to cure it, you would find all the loving assistance of His affection at the disposal of your

* See our *Formation à l'Humilité* (Méditation IX).

weakness. God has such a good memory! Such and such little acts of generosity, lost in the past and forgotten by you, still call forth in Him the yearning to love you; your original fervour touched some of His heart's chords that are still ready to echo, and His arms, which were wont to clasp you to His breast, only ask to be enabled to open again!

Alas! if you felt all this, you would be no longer lukewarm, and in spite of your defects, and even of your sins, you would yet feel a thrill of life! You have fallen from a higher region, and you have found your satisfaction in earthly gratifications, and in the idleness of carelessness. You have lowered your ideal. You have lessened yourself. Your life is without activity, as it is without joy. It is so fragile that a mere nothing may shatter it.

On this reminder of thoughts that were dear to you and which are still familiar to you, if you yet find some desire of returning to God and to your own heart, your ideal of the future and your fervour of the past, then dare to hope. Do not say that you have gone down too far and that you have no strength to make the ascent; that in you all is dead, even your power to will, and that these tardy efforts to raise yourself would only make the disappointment of a new fall more painful.

Oh, do not say or think that! You speak as if you were alone, alone with your difficulties, your attachments, and your formed habits, alone and without any Father who is all-powerful. And yet He has been waiting for you, and to-day He is calling you; and if He is calling you, it is because He loves you still, it is because He has a number of graces all ready for you, graces proportioned to your needs, however great they may be. That you can do nothing, experience proves; but you can do everything in Him who is your strength: and is not this strength at the mercy of your repentance?

No doubt it will be painful for you to fathom your evil state, and to try to find and take the means to cure it; but is this not a duty imposed upon you by the moral law? Will you ask God to pick you up as if you were a lifeless creature, and to bear you, as if by a miracle, into the region of fervour? But for Him this would be a sign of weakness, and for you a sign of disgrace! A being endowed with freedom is bidden to leave the abyss into which he has fallen, and to make good what he has undone: God will be always ready to come to his aid.

NOTE.—In this study of relapse, we have rather to analyze the special *causes* of the evil than to point out the *remedies*, for the latter are none other than those for lukewarmness.

II. Its Most Subtle Causes

I.—TEMPTATIONS AND FALLS

Trace your relapse to its origin. Were you the victim of violent temptations which result in disaster? Instead of turning your mind away from them, instead of fleeing from such and such an occasion, instead of praying more and opening your case more frankly to your confessor, did you not fail in this prudent conduct all along the line? And then you found yourself invaded and obsessed, losing voluntarily, though with alarm, the control of your thoughts, the mastery of your feelings, and the dominion over your will.

i. Perhaps you did not then fall into mortal sin, and you were reassured; but an invincible languor came over you; you concentrated all your efforts on one thing, not to fall into the abyss; and you will remember all your troubles and perplexities! There were indifferent confessions, strictly just enough, followed by cold and decent communions, and these, indeed, were able to maintain you; but amidst all these imaginations and desires, and quickly recurring temptations, your fervour was thrown into confusion and put to flight;

it withdrew, like the dove, after she had searched in vain for some place to rest the sole of her foot on the surface of the muddy earth.

And then circumstances changed, and the crisis passed away, but the vanished fervour did not return. Your soul was in the state of a person whose health has been compromised by some grave malady, the effects of which cannot be shaken off. Nothing remains but diminished vigour, sometimes sickly, often exposed to a return of the original ill, and to an early death.

ii. And you who have fallen into grave sins, you soon afterwards went to obtain absolution; you went perhaps to accompany the movement of the circle in which you live, perhaps urged on by fear; but you did not bring your heart to the confessional, and you did not begin a new life, or leave all after-thoughts at Jesus' feet. Certain guilty habits were not frankly disowned. Being still alive, they lay in watch for you for a few days, and you had taken no sturdy resolution against them, nor any serious means. Or else you found yourself once more amidst the *occasions* you had promised to flee, and you fell, and kept on falling, at shorter and shorter intervals. And you obtained repeated absolutions; absolutions which were doubtful, but which reassured you; real absolutions,

if you will, but such as purified the soul, as it were, superficially, without effecting a radical cure.

Thus it is that the soul gets spoilt; thus it is that the will loses its energy; thus it is that the sense of one's dignity gets cheapened, and no longer arouses a repulsion for what is wrong. Hence come still deeper falls, and more inveterate habits; hence come the growing sense of one's impotence, and the death of every good desire, and lastly, the fearful peace that arises from weariness. One is weary of fighting, weary of seeing one's own cowardice, and of being afraid, and one abandons one's self to uncertainty, to what may chance to happen, and sometimes to doubt, since the absence of faith gives a relative repose, and, in any case, an excuse.

And yet, many such people continue their prayers, and what prayers! and their communions, and what communions! and their confessions, which only cauterize one wound over another!

II.—MERE DRIFTING

But no, you have had no violent upset. Your life has been free from great temptations, and continues honourable and, apparently, virtuous; and nevertheless all your spiritual energies are slackened and remain inert. You no longer have any time, nor, alas! any taste for the things of God. All prayer is a weariness to you. Anything that speaks of devotion leaves you discontented: you see in it nothing but exaggerated feelings, counsels that are contrary to nature, and demands that cannot be admitted. The language of your native country has become strange to you, and its sounds, which were formerly so pleasant, to-day hurt your ears. Your notion of the good is lowered; you live an entirely natural life. A pagan soul must be much like yours!

If you are not yet hostile, you are indifferent; but indifference is enough to kill the life of morality.

How is it that you have come to such a pass? How did this sad descent come about? Simply because you have allowed yourself to drift. "*The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,*" and you are not among the violent who bear it away. Nature goes of itself to the things of nature; it is only by force that one raises one's self to the

things of God. Acting, speaking, opening up fresh relationships, amusing one's self, being bored, complaining, busying one's self about everything that happens, interesting one's self in trifles, getting excited about local, personal, or public questions—such is the life you have fashioned for yourself; it is an escape by which all ardour oozes out; it is a hopeless tangle in which one loses one's self, an obsession which is overwhelming! Here there is no longer any place for higher views; the Christian duties, which are still carried out, are like soulless bodies, and the prayers but empty forms! Alas! the very remainders of what is good must be pointed at as dangerous illusions, for they set you at ease!

Generally, your relapse will date from some change of position. Until then, you lived in surroundings that sustained you. Your devotional life went quietly along the way marked out for it. A favourable stream carried you with it toward what was good. It may have been a boarding-school, or a Christian family; your existence was free from anxiety and from engrossing desires.

But now all of a sudden your existence is taken hold of by new surroundings. You no longer see the same faces; you no longer breathe the same air. Other tastes and pleasures fill your heart. All your former habits are upset. You could, and you ought to, continue your devotional practices

by ordering them otherwise. You find no time to think about it, and the contentment you feel in getting free from such duties takes sides with your negligences. Sometimes you are conscious of a certain remorse, but its voice is so faint that you can scarcely hear it. It is stilled with the everlasting pretext: I have no time. And it is lulled to sleep with the delusive promise: I will begin again after a while.

But you do not begin again. Time goes by; faith remains, but piety is gone. Look at such a poor soul once more. She has taken her likeness from her surroundings. Her actual environment has won possession of her, and stamped her with its image, as a coin is stamped with an image in the machinery of the mint. The lukewarmness about her has enervated her, like the relaxing climates that gradually rob the blood of all its richness.

Oh, for heaven's sake, shake off your indifference, which has not yet become an invincible torpor; do not wait until some unexpected assault overcomes your weakness; raise your eyes with humble confidence to God. With His aid, you will throw off the load which is crushing out your breath; and you will make room for Christian influences, which will gradually restore vitality to the good elements which negligence has left so weak, but which it has not radically destroyed.

III.—DISAPPOINTMENT IN DEVOTION

Among the causes of lukewarmness, there is one which has a certain nobleness, which makes it touching: you have grown lukewarm because of some disappointment as to what you expected from God!

Certainly, the disappointment arose from your own illusions and exacting requirements; and the consequent relapse is entirely your own work, but in a certain sort of way, God was the occasion of it.—Your first consolations disappeared.—You met with misfortunes which your earnest prayers were unable to prevent.—You truly and keenly desired a holy vocation, and followed it up perhaps, but unsuccessfully: you had other aims, but they proved equally deceptive.

You have fallen from these heights and are now, as it were, in a state of collapse, and your mind is upset and your heart oppressed. What! are so many prayers of no profit, and so many efforts to bear no fruit! Your confidence seems to be deceived, and it breaks down. Your broken wing can soar no longer!

Let us make a separate analysis of each of these three cases.

i. *Vanished Consolations.*

You had given yourself up entirely to God, and God had welcomed you. You enjoyed His consolations in your prayers and in your communions, during the day, and even on occasions for making sacrifices. Weeks and months, and perhaps years, passed in this way. You had not the same sweetness at all times. A certain coldness chilled you from time to time amidst this spring weather, but it soon vanished on coming into contact with the sacraments, or on your experiencing some revulsion of sorrowful feeling.

What you might have remarked, indeed, and what unfortunately escaped your attention, was that you *were not becoming in any way more truly established.* You were gentle, patient, affable, when nothing crossed you too much. Your fidelity to your devotional exercises, too, depended on your actual dispositions. You abandoned them, or, at least, fulfilled them with carelessness during times of dryness. You committed very few sins, but they were always the same, showing that you were not making any serious efforts. However, a certain self-satisfaction overshadowed your life. You certainly had the form, and even a feeling, of humility, but you had not the quality itself. A multitude of things showed it. In fine, there were

many flowers of hope all about you. You were devout; but you were not growing better.

Trial came, trial which strengthens or casts down, and which always reveals the true state of the soul. Consolation vanished, and with it vanished the help that it gives. But, note well, such help is always, in a sense, external, and something additional. You still kept all the real helps; the power of grace which is never wanting, the permanent power of acquired goodness, the power of the will when it is truly generous. And yet you suddenly found yourself alone, weak, and hesitating. After a time of doubtful perseverance, after receiving a certain amount of advice without confidence, you let yourself *drift*. To drift is to omit anything that costs, to yield to the demands of nature, a slope on which one slides down by degrees. At first one descends hesitatingly and cautiously; one would not go so far as to sin: but later on, the pace quickens.

The dryness that lasts a few days, this you knew; but now it lasts for weeks and months, and goes on indefinitely. Then prayer is slowly given up; dangerous likings, selfish refinements, the workings of self-love, irritability and dissatisfaction, begin to dominate you; they fill your life, and you see depart the things that were its honour

and protection : self-forgetfulness, humility, and mortification.

The trial to which one succumbs rarely comes from God. It is nearly always our own mistakes and sins that bring it about. Besides, whatever may be its origin, it is our slackness that makes it degenerate into a relapse.

Your returns to fervour did not last. You fell ever lower and lower, at any rate into indifference and torpor ; you became lukewarm because consolation vanished. And what ruin there has been from that time ! If consolation were to return, it would be like a pale sun which shines enough to light up the ruins, but has not sufficient warmth to make life grow upon them.

Will you then sit still in this chilly shade, with your head in your hands, and with wandering thoughts ? Will you go still deeper into the desert and plunge into the darkness ? Perhaps it is a question of life or death. What would you do, if your eternity depended on the decision you are going to take this very hour ?

In order to recognize your position and to receive encouragement, read the different passages in this book that concern you ; attentively meditate on the reasons for contrition ; and reflect on the means proposed. These reasons and these means have saved other souls, why should they not reach yours ?

Regain your confidence; resume your abandoned exercises and omitted communions. *Above all, do not look for consolation in them.* Strength must be enough for you. Fulfil your daily duties resolutely. Bear your troubles with a spirit of faith. Make your heart learn once more to listen to the sweet appeals of happier days. Live nearer to God, and if, on the road that leads to recovery, you sometimes experience the sudden change of good desires into reviving repugnances, do not be surprised: the malady is only passing through a fresh crisis; nature is striving against grace; the long past is coming to life again and finds nothing stronger than a weak will to overcome it; it is the enemy who is trying to bar your way. Go forward. By degrees, habits opposed to the former ones will give you an easy triumph, and will assure you calm control in your fervour regained at last.

ii. *The Trial of Misfortune.*

The ordinary run of people require a little human happiness to keep them devout. Their fidelity depends to a great extent on what God does for them. Do they quite understand this? Doubtless, not. They are devout just as they are happy, because it comes fairly natural to them. The inevitable troubles of life appear to them to be trial enough

for this life, and even that seems to press far too heavily. But now the sky becomes strangely overcast; a threatening danger arises. "O Thou who art omnipotent," they cry, "spare me this sorrow, for it is too hard. O Thou, whom I never call upon in vain, see, I am on my knees; I clasp my hands; I kiss my crucifix, and I set this pledge of all pity between heaven and that which I would keep at all costs! O Christ, speak, offer Thy blood once more; Thou hast indeed put Thy merits in our hands, and they are infinite! If I, indeed, am not able to touch Thy heart, I summon to my assistance Thy Mother, who is also mine, and whose all-powerful influence accepts no refusal!"

Such were your prayers, perhaps day and night, at the death-bed of some loved one, in the face of some imminent calamity, or against anything that threatened your happiness. How many fervent novenas you made! How many prayers you asked for! How many Masses you had offered for these intentions! Heaven and all its powers were appealed to by your confidence.

And your confidence was betrayed: the calamity fell! And then your piety vanished along with your happiness. Your soul became like a deserted and ruined temple. A dark sorrow took possession of it, and dwells there. Your heart in its bitterness can only say despairingly: "Why did God

smite me thus? Why did He let me offer so many prayers in vain? It was but lost trouble, of which nothing remains behind! And yet, I only asked Him for something right and necessary, and that He might well have granted me!" And in one's bewilderment, one may perhaps go so far as to quote the words of a woman who was without any belief:

"Tir'd of its deafness, thinketh heav'n is void!"

Poor soul, alas! you altogether misunderstand religion and true life, which is eternity filled with God! You drink in the blood of Jesus Christ! Do you not understand that, even at your prayer, heaven could not inevitably be moved to grant a transitory good, and that this sort of favour only depends on conditional promises? Do you think that with blood and sorrow, with the blood and sorrow of His Son, God only means to secure a secondary, imperfect, and perhaps dangerous happiness, such as you demand in your blindness? Do you think that He would have permitted His blood to flow, and His terrible sorrows to end in death, if He had not something more in view than your earthly happiness? Would you yourself dare to lift up your voice and to exclaim: "Jesus, by Thy bitter Passion, give me back my human joys, and if Thou refusest them to me, I cannot understand Thee any more"?

No, indeed, you do not understand Him as God, for you lower His high thoughts; you do not understand Him as your real Friend, for you think only of yourself; you do not understand Him as to His designs on your behalf, for He was offering you to become the likeness of His Crucifixion and the associate of His work of Redemption; He was offering you to win a great love, a great virtue, and an immense increase of eternal happiness!

For mercy's sake, unbend, and do not be unjust in your inflexibility. Weep tears of resignation, for then they will be full of sweetness. Mingle your human sorrow with the divine, and you will begin to get a comprehension of both, and perhaps to love them. Are not our griefs the highest kind of preparation, and sometimes necessary safeguards? You will come to love them, whether they are sweet or bitter, since they procure real happiness. Happiness is not at all taken away from you. It has only left the cold ground, where it merely brings forth flowers which are frail and scentless, to fly up to heaven, the land of its birth, and the true climate in which it has what is necessary for its blossoming in full.

iii. *Troubles as to One's Vocation.*

It is not uncommon for those to fall into a state of relapse who have long dallied with the idea of the religious life, and who end by remaining in the world. Let us try to analyze the causes, which also bring to this sad condition many who have nothing to reproach themselves with, as well as those who owe their unfortunate loss to real failings.

In either case, the cause is an impression that they have fallen away, and that their falling away is due to some unfaithfulness. Whether the impression be well founded or no, it exists, and it produces these bad effects.

The notion of having fallen away assails the secret self-love, which rebels or collapses in the face of humiliation. *The idea of unfaithfulness* disturbs the conscience, and disposes one to an all-round fear. Such a person, if still virtuous, would accept the humiliation, knowing well its value, but since he is imperfect, he only accepts it intellectually, but unwillingly. He feels it, and his wounded self-love, through a natural reaction, goes to increase what lies close by, the sense of unfaithfulness. He would not venture to bewail the ruins of his pride, but he thinks it meritorious to lament the downfall of his vocation. Oh, how hurtful are

such tears! They do not really spring from regret: and this is why they demoralize rather than uplift one. A deep despondency weighs down your life; and your disinclination extends from the things of God to many of the things of this world. After a certain time, lukewarmness sets in, real lukewarmness.

Poor soul, you now neglect your duties; you try to find gratifications to compensate you for your disappointments, and you indulge in them without putting yourself under any too nice restrictions. Sins increase in number and in seriousness. By degrees, the sting of remorse gets dulled by the increasing hardness of your indifference, and custom at last gives a lamentable permanence to all these genuine failings.

And yet, among such persons, many have not really been unfaithful or hindered the designs of God, or failed in their vocation! It is merely a *persuasion* to the contrary that has done all the mischief. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance not to fall into such a mistake. People are led to do so by certain inaccurate ideas as to vocation.

1. There is nothing in the world greater or grander than the religious state. In it is found the perfect realization of the Evangelical Counsels, a sure refuge from the evils

of life, and self-sacrifice in its noblest form. The vows bind one to Jesus by bonds as close as they are sacred, and God looks with love upon an existence which seems to belong to Him already. Is it to be wondered at, if some of the finest spirits feel the attraction of such a destiny, an attraction which may nevertheless fall short of being a call? In this case, the attraction is their own admiration. This admiration comes, either from an enthusiastic disposition, or from the manifold influences of an environment in which the religious life is held in honour.

Experience is required, if one is to distinguish, amidst similar effects, the differences of origin. Who can tell the charms of the appeal that seems to make itself heard, the freshness of the hopes that impart a thrill, the nobility of the motives that are felt to be so pressing, the generous ardour that is ready to welcome self-sacrifice, and the love that already is aware of the sweetness hidden therein?

Is this, then, all due to mere imagination, since, as a matter of fact, it was not a divine call? No, here imagination was the *meeting-point* of the truest and finest feelings. God Himself inspired them with His grace and looked upon them with favour.

How can God show anyone heights which he is not meant to attain, stir up generous

offerings that are not intended to be accepted, and set in motion a whole world of feelings that will disappear and not be able to continue, like the clouds of dust raised by the wind on some broad road ?

Well, God can do this ; and when He does it, He does it in His wisdom and goodness. After all, what do such and such an immediate end and our short-sighted logic matter to Him ? Is it not His great aim to *fashion souls ?* But, in the case in point, He fashions them by different means. He puts them face to face with an ideal, so that they may take in the meaning of it, just as one sends young artists, who may never paint masterpieces, to study the work of the great masters. Unless these sights had come under their eyes, certain dispositions would have remained commonplace. Without these incipient essays, some hearts would have never known the divine intimacy. Without this impulse towards the religious life, some souls would have never entered into any endeavour towards perfection ; for its underlying notion—belonging to God — sums up everything, *detachment* and *union ;* and because it is a *living* idea, it is a creative force. In permitting such and such a person to tend towards an end which is not his own, God makes him, then, advance towards that which is the general end of every holy life.

Later on, when He has set aside the aim pursued to show him another. He will be there, helping on the difficult crossing, and watching to see that any improvements acquired, instead of collapsing, shall be turned to advantage. In case of need, in His fatherly love He will condescend to put up with any passing impatience, and to preserve in the depths of the heart what appears to have been lost for a time.

Yes, for the shock is a rude one, but this, too, is only another means of training ; *real* humility is learnt by these kinds of disappointment, and self-will is broken down by the violent blow, and if the soul comes through the trial full of faith and trustfulness, she is God's for ever !

However, we must add that God has never deceived the soul through all her trials. He cannot deceive, even to do good. It was not He who murmured in her ear the magical words : the religious life, giving up everything, self-immolation ; He merely allowed them to make themselves heard, as being related to all the beautiful things which appeal to the soul, and to all our own feelings which thus found utterance for their generous ardour.

2. Let us now speak to those who have really heard the voice of God. Shall we say to them all without any distinction : if you are in a state of lukewarmness, you

have deserved it ; you have withdrawn from God, and God, in His turn, has withdrawn from you : it is but just ?

No, indeed, we will not employ this language to anyone, because it would be too hard. God suffers. God curtails His favours, and He is sometimes angry. But will He cast souls off ? It would be to go against His own heart ; nay, more, it would be, at any rate with regard to a large number, to go against His own sense of equity.

In fact, if some have shown that they are positively rebellious, how many others have had doubts as to their vocation ! This illusion, which always implies some sort of fault, even if it be merely a want of prudence, also includes a certain amount of excuse. It makes the refusal less than formal, and any resistance not fully conscious ; it was thought needful to wait, and now time has done its work ; it has enabled difficulties to arise, and human inconstancy to get worn out. The thought of sparing others an evil, or of procuring them a good, suddenly came to alter the bearing of your life, or else a desire for some legitimate happiness turned your higher aspirations towards human affections. At the bottom of it all there was a certain confused sense of unfaithfulness. Recourse was not had to God's counsels for the purpose of clearing up any

uncertainty: and perhaps there was some unacknowledged dread of consulting them; for, was one sure to have enough courage to follow them? But there was no question of making a definite and hurtful refusal.

3. We may now go still further. Yes, you have disregarded the divine call; you have refused to follow the path which He was pointing out to you. Does it follow that you are guilty? Is it possible to declare that you have even deeply compromised your future.

In the Gospel, we see two kinds of calls: the call that is a kind of command, such as that of the Apostles: "*Leave your ships, and follow Me,*" and the call made to the young man whom Jesus loved: "*If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and follow Me.*"

Here it is only an invitation—*If thou wilt*—that Jesus proposes. It is infinitely wise to run to meet such advances. To decline them is a sign of feebler love. The course of life certainly runs a risk of following dangerous paths; and, in any case, the acts in which it abounds will not be uplifted by an entire self-oblation; but where there is nothing but counsel, there is not in itself matter for sin; and God, who did not count this defection as sin, could not punish it by a refusal of His love, nor by a refusal of

His grace, nor by a refusal of perfection itself. In worldly relationships, and even in the family, are not sincere affections accepted, even though incomplete? and would not one reproach one's self, if, in a kind of vindictive spirit, one were to fail those who offer them? Are they not ready to render us numerous services, and is that part of their affections, which they are ready to give us, to be despised?

And if this is the case, when the *refusal is certain and formal*, what is to be thought of poor souls who lament all their lives on account of a refusal, which is doubtful and unconscious? However, indeed, that may be, certainly the discouragement that followed was far graver than the want of affection from which it sprang.

4. Lastly, to go on to the end. You were the subject of an imperative call, and you had no doubt of it. Your nature itself, from its special dangers, put your prudence under the obligation of looking for some helpful refuge. Besides, higher yearnings drew you to the religious life, and wise counsels also went to confirm the call. Then courage failed you, either to embrace the perfect life, or else to persevere in it. After putting your hand to the plough, you cast such regretful looks behind you that the furrow was never drawn. Your lukewarmness dates from that decisive moment, and

it has become extreme. Your heart has become indifferent or embittered. No pleasant light shines upon your footsteps. Discouragement is your absolute lord. We will not enquire, whether more or less grave sins came in its train, whether your failings grew worse, and whether your life was saddened. Let us assume that the case was as bad as possible. Well, then, even you, such as your infidelities have made you, have still the most certain and the greatest capacity not only for becoming good again, but for advancing towards the highest perfection.

All lives possess a mysterious power of adaptation. Outwardly, they end by becoming acclimatized to the most unhealthy surroundings; inwardly, they find supplementary energies to take the place of the normal ones that have come to be wanting. The climate, to which your unfaithfulness has led you, is not the one that was suited to your needs. Your deviations, your formed habits, are in contradiction with the requirements of God's service. Your moral temperament is impaired. Do not despair.

The supplementary aids, of which we were speaking, are here found in the *will* and in *grace*, the two remaining vital principles.

You must resolve upon the sacrifices and

necessary efforts, and this is hard ; you must pray, and this is tiresome. What does it matter, if it is hard and tiresome ? Do it nevertheless, and, by degrees, progress becomes easier ; and, here and there, the light breaks through.

Then come crises. If one wins a victory, that is a great step forward ; if one goes under, one picks one's self up, rather wearier, no doubt, but always having the same means of improvement at one's disposal.

You rightly and prudently place your life amidst more favourable conditions ; you look for help from the sacraments ; you seek for the support of firm direction ; and, in this way, by one triumph after another, you regain good-will and progress and fervour.

Oh, why should you doubt God ? Cannot He open a new way for us up to the heights ?

Exhortations and Counsels for all the Relapsed

Oh all who have fallen away from your original fervour, you have a common need, an immense need, the need of overcoming your discouragement, for it is discouragement alone that keeps you in bondage.

A thousand different causes give rise to a state of relapse ; a thousand different effects result from it ; moral disorganization may be deeper or less deep in this case or that ; but discouragement is invariably found in all cases, and it is this alone that inexorably oppresses them. Whatever their position, and however low they may have fallen, it is the same chain that binds them.

Break this chain by a vigorous act of due confidence ; go on to conquer your entire liberty ; behave like resolute soldiers, who, on the command of their leader, charge to the assault without looking at what is ahead of them, except to overcome it. Let nothing stop you, not even wounds. Get so far away from the lukewarm life that you cannot come back to it.

But if you feel that you are weak and languishing, hope nevertheless. At the coming of Jesus, do you not hear fall from heaven those authoritative invitations, the

value of which has not at all decreased with the lapse of time: "*Come, come all of you. Lift up the hands that hang down, and make strong the feeble knees. All you that thirst, come to the waters: and you that have no money, make haste, buy, and eat: come ye, buy wine and milk, without money, and without any price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which doth not satisfy you? Come and fear not: here you may buy unchecked; for here is not justice, who will enforce full payment from you, but mercy, who will give to you for nothing.*" And these waters never fail; they are the flood of Jesus' merits, the stream of blood and love, the stream that washes every stain away, the stream that reinvigorates, the stream from which the divine life derives its vital sap and makes it flow through all who are ready to receive it with confidence and good-will.

Yes, all may be restored, your innocence and strength and love, and even your former happiness. Yes, all can be restored, because God is bound to wish it. There is not a moment throughout eternity in which He does not wish all good and each good. There is not a grace among the greatest which has not been already merited by Jesus Christ. There is not a single exception from whom His promises are withheld. We will never cease to say: your slackness, your broken-

down condition, your helplessness, and lastly, the lukewarmness that oppresses you, are always curable. Even after years and years of this state of things, even after thousands of divine advances roughly repelled, you certainly have the capacity to rise and live.

Everyone can say : Jesus died for me. He who is baptized has a still better right to say it : Jesus has incorporated him in Himself. And what can be said of one who was for a long time a lover of Jesus ? To all the universal rights are added the special rights of affection. Affection, really intimate affection, no longer is alive, but it leaves many memories behind it, and many odours. The heart, on either side, still retains its impressions and regrets. Oh, how quickly does an affection, which once went deep, regain its life and dominion ! And then, are there no extenuating circumstances ? Even if there was unfaithfulness in the abandonment of the separation, there were still some efforts and sacrifices, and there were, above all, many disappointments and many sorrows. Jesus did not forget these. Oh, if you only really understood His heart, all would be well, for you would immediately recover the disposition in which you are wanting and which would be enough ; courage combined with confidence.

And what sort of courage shall this be ? A *resolute courage,* to start duty again, a

humble courage, not reckoning much on self, but intending to have recourse to God; a *patient* courage, which will not be surprised if it finds, perhaps to-morrow, nature tiresome, weary, full of distaste, and, sometimes, even positively hostile.

The soul of courage is confidence. And let us repeat everlastingly: confidence is a right, a duty, and a need. You can never have too much confidence, if you associate it with good-will.

Keep this feeling alive by coming into contact with God, think often of His mercy and promises and fatherhood. Resume the habit of calling upon Him for help. Love to thank Him for any victory you have won. It is not He who places any reserves on the outpouring of His goodness, it is we who put restrictions upon Him. Let us enable Him to be generous, to be Himself.

Persevere in courage and in confidence amidst the depressing feelings which weigh them down, in spite of the passing failures which arise to disconcert them, and in spite of the slackness which seems to return with an instinctive longing for a fresh relapse, because it looks like a kind of repose.

Be on your watch against the devil: he will try to turn any of your imperfect dispositions to account. Sometimes, he will make them seem to you guilty and odious, to fill you with doubts as to God's feelings

towards you; sometimes, on the contrary, he will try to lull your fears to sleep by making you look upon lukewarmness as a harmless state, because it is so very general. He will bring about little negligences and slight sins; he will make you put off going to confession or to communion, on the ground of its being an unimportant delay; he will revive your passions, arouse keen irritation, and make your pride swell: all of which makes a man beside himself and violently put to flight good resolutions.

Oh all you who wish to get rid of lukewarmness, know that victory depends upon being faithful every day and in every detail. In order to overcome even great temptations, nothing is more efficacious than the constant fulfilment of present duties. Confine yourself to them, wrap yourself up in them, do not allow yourself to be so imprudent as to look away from them; for thus the devil will be treated with disdain and depart, and your evil nature will be mastered and subdued.

If the path of simple duty, of peaceful exercises and continual petty victories, seems to you monotonous and troublesome, remember that the road back is also the way to expiate your guilty past. If the slowness of the work tempts you to despair, think of the progressive graces of which we speak elsewhere: they increase with our strength

after each partial recovery, and after the keen regret that follows each defeat.

By degrees, you will feel your life coming back. Devotional exercises will make a peaceful place in each day of your life. Acts of virtue will become easier. You will feel God nearer to you and your heart more open. The road will have lost its appearance of desolation: you are getting nearer to your Father's house. Do you not see a little light gleaming through the darkness? Quicken your pace; at the faint knocking of your humble call, the hospitable door will open, and Father and child will meet once more, and this time never to part!

A USEFUL TABLE FOR RECORDING DEFINITE RESOLUTIONS AND THEIR FULFILMENT

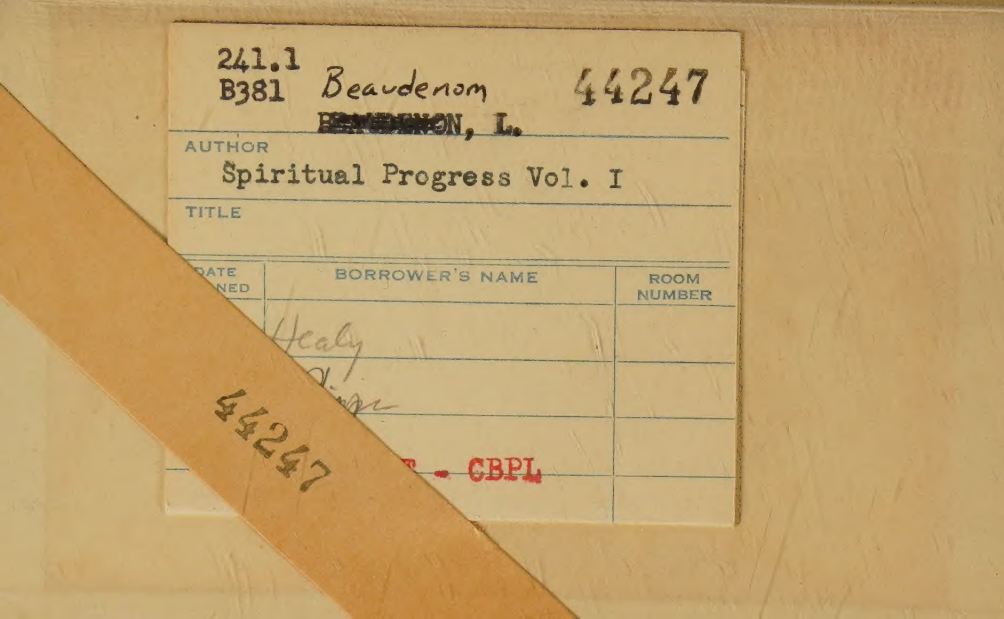
(*Fill in a similar table after every confession, or every month.*)

Did I keep my resolution or not ?	Why ?
I will watch over myself as to	I will use the following means .....

Similar tables can be made and kept secret.

If you are not bold enough thus to set down your remarks and resolutions in writing, at any rate read the above table and make mental replies at every confession.

If an account is given to one's confessor, the means will be used to the fullest advantage.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